

## Why Wargame at Fortress Vechten (Utrecht, NL) seminar on Sept. 14 / game lab on Sept. 15, 2015

It's the 14<sup>th</sup> of September when the mists lift slowly from the fields surrounding the Fortress (<http://www.fortvechten.nl>) Feeling a drizzling rain falling down, the defenders watch the fields from the ramparts, in the silence of fear and anticipation.

At 10 o'clock sharp the opening maneuvers are being led by Dr. Peter Perla – Author of The Art of Wargaming - , who takes us to his early beginnings of wargaming through the games of Risk, Tactics and Midway, fueled by reading Churchill's memoirs at an early age. He showed us that wargamers are a different breed of people, in that they look differently at the world and use wargames to better understand that world. This journey took Peter to the Wargaming Department at the US Naval War College, and a career at the Center for Naval Analysis.



The opening moves had not gone unobserved. A reaction was to be expected soon, therefore Peter seized the advantage and fixed the opposition in his follow-on presentation about why Wargaming works. He has the audience well and truly fixed without room to maneuver when he explains that Operational Analysis is not the same as Wargaming. Operational Analysis is about numbers and facts, while Wargaming is about people and experience. The power of this maneuver becomes evident when he explains the origins of this power; the narrative contained in the scenario in the wargame. Something happens in the human brain when it is engaged in a story; the narrative actually facilitates the acquisition of new experiences, new knowledge, greatly enhancing the insights gained by wargaming.

His proposed definition for Wargaming: "A "wargame" is a model or simulation of competition or conflict in an artificial environment that does not involve the operations of actual forces, in which people are challenged to make decisions that change themselves, their interaction, and the environment."

After coffee and cakes, the 50 participants prepare themselves to engage and open the breach now Peter has fixed the unknown. For this purpose we called in Mark Stoop ([Scenarios4Summits.com](http://Scenarios4Summits.com)) For the great punch Mark Stoop used the mechanism of Scenario Based Policy Discussions to channel high political power. In this manner he was able to leverage the input of key world leaders in the NSS summit and cyber security summit in The Hague.

Mark energetically led the way by presenting a fantastic tale of high politics, good story telling and great cinematography.



Granted the scenarios were not full wargames as we know them, but scenarios are part of wargaming and these scenarios do open the breach and might help establish the value of wargaming to those responsible for strategic maneuvering / sr leadership.

After a copious lunch we were ready to exploit the breach and open up the world of wargaming much more widely. To this end all participants joined in to play four widely different wargames.

On the left flank the Full Strategy Experience Game enabled the participants to experience the full cycle from strategy development to strategy execution. [Changing-games.nl](http://Changing-games.nl)  
 The center was held by Teamwork, here two teams explored the dynamics of warfare and of wargaming by experience in a tactical Kriegspiel. [Dr Swen Stoop](http://Dr Swen Stoop)  
 The right flank was secured by the Chain Game, a digital game about strategy in logistics whereby the payers used Ipads. [TNO.nl](http://TNO.nl)  
 The reserve was formed by a Business Wargame by sterling men in the open air, preparing for future operations. The reserve exercised in the tent covered court yard. [MFIB.nl](http://MFIB.nl)



To maintain our hold and consolidation Marcel Prinsenber (Sr. Director from [PwC](http://PwC) ) provided a telling story about facilitating education and decision making in businesses through a combination of red teaming, scenario setting, storytelling and competition. Using this business wargaming toolset they have entered the world of many leading business in the Netherlands and abroad.



To maintain momentum this presentation was quickly followed by a practical example of a game by Christianne Leenhouts (PwC). She, and this bears repeating, told us about an experiment that she will be conducting in the near future. In this proposed game for senior leadership, these leaders will actually be put in a physically challenging environment in which they have to play a game representing challenges to their organization in their real world business environments. She was talking about a warehouse, continuous rain, thunder, and hard caps would be obligatory. No sir, sitting quietly and enjoying our victories is not an option. At least not yet.



Still, the body like the mind should be nourished so we pulled back for a moment behind the moot, set sentries on the ramparts, and went for some drinks and other less intoxicating nourishments. The rule being, to be available for the after action review.

The AAR was chaired by Anja vd Hulst. Together with Peter Perla and Swen Stoop she briefly looked back at Connections US, UK and NL 2015.

Anja started off by an insightful personal experience when she told us about her role as the leader at a wargame in the UK the week before. This wargame was about a sudden influx of refugees and about how nations coped with the challenges that resulted from this influx. Her story was sobering, in the sense that she felt compelled to actions she would have preferred not to take. The experience provide much food for thought.

Peter Perla mentioned the renewed high level interest in wargaming by the US Department of Defense, and was cautiously optimistic. Peter put forward the need to be clear what wargaming might be up to: to develop a professional standard of wargames and wargaming. Both as a means to ride the charlatans out of town, literally, and to improve the overall standard of wargaming.

Swen Stoop mentioned the overall high quality of Connections UK 2015 and the return of wargaming within the British army. Of note were the presentations by Ed McGrady, clearly illustrating the 'human in the loop' focus that makes wargaming special and powerful. Devin Ellis lifted a tip of the veil on wargaming in China. And professor Phil Sabin established the value of wargaming in contemporary education and historical research.

See more reports on [www.professionalwargaming.co.uk](http://www.professionalwargaming.co.uk)



As the first day of operations by Connections NL drew to a close it was time for diner. A Tapas buffet that proved to be good and delicious food, facilitating network opportunities between the participants and establishing new connections.

Highlight of the evening was a Waterloo Commemoration Coin presented to Dr Peter Perla. The coin is a two and a half Euro Coin minted in Belgium to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. Needless to say, the French were not happy about it. However it was our delight to present the coin to Peter Perla in appreciation of his part in Connections NL 2015.

Thus ended the very first day of Connections NL. It was held in the historical environment of Fort Vechten, an old fort and museum on the water based defense that have helped defend the Netherlands for over 400 years. A fact which was shown and told in a beautiful narrative by Mr. Bas Kreuger, Head of the Knowledge Center of the Waterlinie Museum (to be officially opened on Oct 8, 2015).



## Day 2 Deep Dive

At Soesterberg we were greeted by the TNO Staff under leadership of Anja van der Hulst (TNO). They guided us to the game laboratory which had been setup for gameplay and a deep dive assessment.

The audience consisted of about 20 participants, most of whom had taken part in the maneuvers the day before. Dr. Peter Perla was also present and paramount to our discussions on wargaming this day.

As befitting a good wargamer tasked with analysis we immediately started by playing a game. This time we choose to play Go4It, a game that teaches the comprehensive approach to officers in the RNL Armed Forces, NGO's and other officials involved in peace keeping operations amongst war torn populations.



It was an great experience to play the full game for a few turns, because only then one comes to appreciate the subtle nuances in game design and game play. Which of course formed the perfect cliffhanger to dive straight into a discussion about the insides of wargaming. Because of the small number of participants this happened in a free flowing format with everybody contributing to the dialogue.

When the staff informed us that lunch was served we physically moved to the lunch area, but mentally the dialogue never stopped, this continued throughout.

It was great to participate, but it was also a joy to observe the dialogue flowing between the participants both during lunch time and afterward upon return to the game laboratory. We all were engaged in a mutually satisfying professional question and answering game under leadership of 'Headmaster' Peter Perla. It's not often that such an opportunity presents itself, it was therefore all the more rewarding.



Over lunch we immersed ourselves in the dialogue on the fundamentals of wargaming and the future of the profession. The results of these dialogues will hopefully show themselves over the course of next year(s).



Shortly afterwards we decided to relocate a third time. Actually this was a totally unplanned maneuver to the nearby National Military Museum (<https://www.nmm.nl>) The museum had recently been opened in a new facility at the former Soesterberg Air Base, able to house and exhibit historical objects from all participant services. On this special venue we did a walk about, experiencing history from a different angle, until time came for closing the museum and Connections NL 2015.



The mission of Connections worldwide:

Advancing and sustaining the art, science and application of wargaming – has landed on Dutch soil for the very first time. From the connections made among the participants hope and expectations stir that a future conference on wargaming might take place in the Netherlands in the near future.



## **The story and the cast of Connections NL 2015**

The story of Connections NL 2015 was developed and organized by Hans Steensma, Eric Versleijen and Swen Stoop, in close collaboration with the guest of honor Dr. Peter Perla and Anja van der Hulst (TNO Soesterberg).

The story has come to life after a first meeting of minds at the Saganet Seminar in 2011, commemorating 200 years of experience with wargaming in education and decision making. In 2014 it was put forward with a bold reconnaissance of wargaming in the Netherlands, testing the waters at the winery of wargaming in 2014 (Bussum, Fort Werk IV).

The presentations from our speakers and links to other media's used by our speakers will be made available on our website [www.saganetconnections.nl](http://www.saganetconnections.nl)

### **The organizers:**



Hans Steensma is co-organizer, wargame operator, reserve Major RNL Marine Corps and Co-owner of Military Formats In Business (MFIB).



Eric Versleijen is co-organizer, wargame designer, co-owner of Changing Games, former RNL Army Major HMV and employed at the Veterans Institute in the Netherlands.



Dr. Swen Stoop is co-organizer, wargame analyst, is quietly researching wargaming, has a PhD in Command and Control assessment and is employed at the Ministry of Finance.

### **The sponsors:**

Connections is primarily a not-for profit event, bringing together professional wargame practitioners and enthusiasts. To keep the barrier low to participants, we have found several sponsors so kind as to donate in support.

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MFIB  
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TNO  
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