



**THE NUGGET
PREPRINT**

Vertical Urban Wargame VCOW2025

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This is a preprint of an article submitted in June 2025 to The Nugget, the Journal of the Wargame Developments (WD) Group, and particularly relates to the game run at the WD Virtual Conference of Wargamers in February 2025, and two games subsequently.

This was a minimally updated version of the subjective point-of-view (POV) wargame by video conferencing that I ran at VCOW 2023. For a full description of what the game involves, and why it's called the Vertical Urban Wargame (VUW) and not the Horizontal Urban Wargame see the OnSide in Nugget #358.

I set up a 6' x 4' cardboard city in 10mm scale on my table (nominally part of Berlin in 1985, in actuality Dropzone Commander Gotham-style SF buildings), and put the 10mm miniatures out (a couple of platoon groups with FV432s and a Chieftain each in support). I then placed a mobile phone behind each lead vehicle, such that the camera gives a commander's hatch view. Each platoon, run by a team of 2 players, has its own camera and video feed, provided by the free Jitsi video conferencing service, which is not seen by anyone else, and Zoom provides a company command voice net. The company commander, who in reality would be a few blocks back, has no video feed and has to rely on what they're being told by the platoon commanders.

The game runs in two phases. In Phase 1 each team controls just one recce vehicle, and, under the control of the company commander, has to find 3 key locations in the city – the Mayor's Office, City Control Centre and the Police HQ. Once located they withdraw and then the two platoon groups come on in Phase 2 to secure the 3 key locations. Of course, the enemy also has a vote, controlled by me with a simple AI, and is on the lookout for the Brits and also wants to secure the buildings.

I ran the game once at VCOW2025, and have run it twice more since to pick up WD members who missed it at VCOW, wanted to play again, or came in from Fight Club. This Onside covers all 3 games.

Seeing as the game ran pretty well last time I didn't feel that I needed to make too many changes. The main ones were:

- Most of the British models were now in Berlin Brigade blocky urban camouflage – that was fun to paint in 10mm, just don't look too closely.
- The out-of-ORBAT Scimitars were replaced by Foxes for the recce phase.
- I added German shop names to about 50% of the buildings to help with navigation.
- I had a small USB power bank to feed the phone who's battery only lasted half the first game!
- Somehow since the last game the phones and Jitsi between them now showed the images the right way up, so I could have the phones just standing on their heads – which made them a lot easier to move than last time when they had to be on their sides.
- Seeing as I hardly referred to the paper AI for Red or the civilians last time I replaced it with a D6 marked up with forward, backward, left, right, forward, dither and just rolled that to move Red and civilians – although I maintained the right to over-rule it to give a better game for the players.
- I'd added some civilian cars and vans to add a bit more clutter, probably more 6mm than 10mm scale, but they just got in the way of the camera the whole time so I junked them after the first game. I kept the Z scale skips though as their bright yellow proved useful navigation points.

The VCOW game went pretty well I think. No shooting up of trees or civilians (although no-one bothered to ask the civvies for directions to the key locations), AFV recognition was pretty good, and the Chieftains got the better of the shoot out on the main East-West road, although a couple of FV432s were lost to early shots from a T72. I don't think all the locations were secured by game end (I was too busy running the game to take notes!), but the players definitely had the upper hand.

The first game after VCOW was the first time that I managed to get the UAV working (in reality my iPad feeding on another Jitsi channel just to the company commander). A bit anachronistic, but given all the focus on UAVs at the moment worth bringing in. The camera had just the right amount of distortion and blurriness, and the company commander was able to direct the UAV for about 90-120 seconds of flight, getting his first sight of the city, and being able to spot enemy AFV concentrations and troops on the rooftop – although target indication back to the platoons on the ground was possibly lacking. For the first time a Chieftain was lost – to a lucky BMP2 hit, and there was also quite a firefight both at the side of the Mayor's office and by the police station. This game had far more dismounted combat than the VCOW one. It took a while for the M72s and Carl Gustav's to get a kill on a pesky BMP, but by ENDEX two locations were secured and RED had no notable armour left.

For the next game, picking up on a suggestion from a player in the AAR to the previous game, I had the two teams nominate who commanded the platoon and who

commanded the Chieftain. This worked pretty well and meant that exchanges with each team tended to be crisper as each player was focussed on a particular task. During the recce phase one of the Foxes took out a BRDM and both objectives were quickly identified. The main force then moved in, both platoons on the same axis, and moved more or less diagonally across the city. As they came into the open around Kniprode Platz RPGs starting popping from the back of the Mayor's office. The Chieftains stood their ground, and started to blow bits out of the building to suppress the enemy. The Company Commander got their UAV overflight and spotted a whole hornet's nest of tanks and BMPs on the road behind the Mayor's Office. One BMP survived a shot from the 2Pl Chieftain which spotted the BMP just under a tree, the shot sailing over its rear deck and smashed into the building beyond. 1Pl took out a BMP by the City Control Centre with a LAW shot down a side-alley. 2Pl stormed the Mayor's office, the defenders having been neutralised by the Chieftain and MG fire, and, with most of the enemy armour not gone were about to storm the Control Centre when ENDEX was declared.

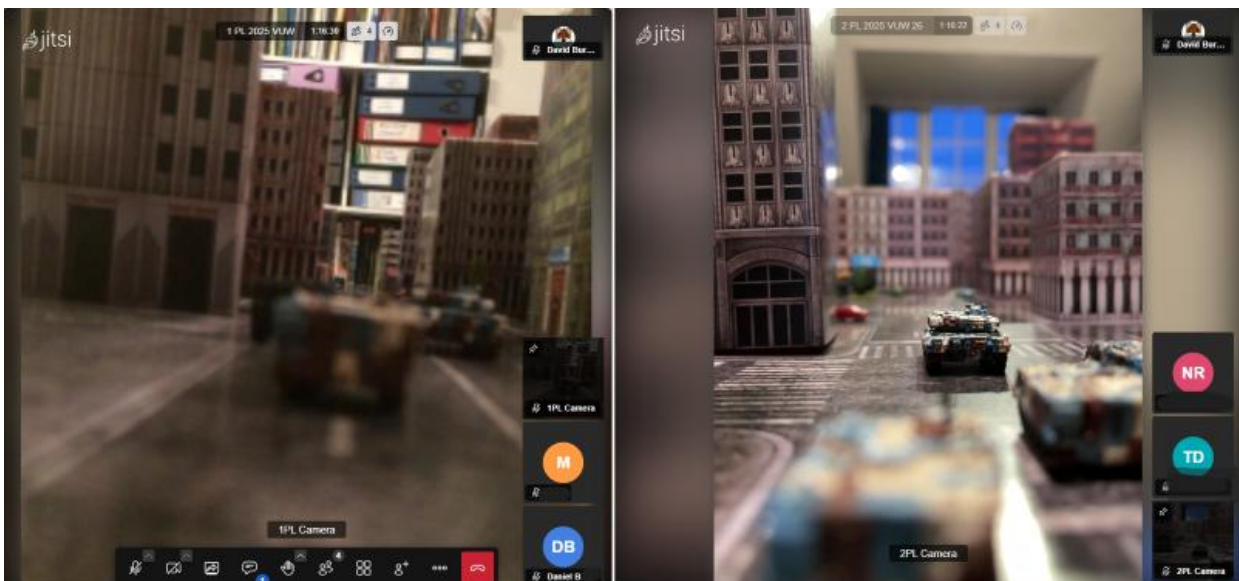
Overall, I think that the game delivers well on presenting the players with a realistic sense of the lack of situational awareness that probably characterises most urban engagements – and the short engagement ranges, something which is hard to do with the traditional “top down”/helicopter view of most urban board and figure games. It is, as several players have remarked, closer to a first-person shooter computer game – but with the flexibility and transparency of a manual game.

Where next with VUW? I have fun running it and players seem to really enjoy playing it. This time round I had players or observers from 4 or 5 countries, and several people have expressed an interest in getting the kit to run it locally, or have me facilitate games for them. Post the VCOW game we also discussed how best to show off the set-up at physical events – maybe not playing the game (which would rely on dubious event wifi and broadband) but giving people a solo experience of just trying to navigate through the city. The game could also benefit from me having someone with me to manage Red or run what adjudication there is. The big step forward would be to make it player vs player, but that really needs 4 cameras/feeds, although alternatives to that were also discussed. So, hopefully we'll see the game evolve a bit more in the next year or so than it has in the last 2 years!

My thanks to all the players for playing the game in such good spirits, and for providing lots of useful constructive feedback both to improve the game and for me to use for my PhD.



The 10mm table layout. Note the mobile phone just visible just beyond the centre of the table.



Two player's eye view thru the Jitsi system.