

Wargaming Urban Conflict PhD

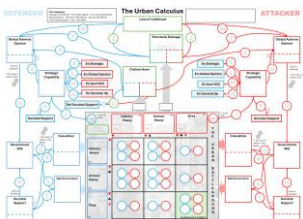
Jul 26

This is a summary of where I am in my work on a PhD in Wargaming Urban Conflict, which I'm doing under Dr John Curry at Bath Spa University. It highlights the main activities I've completed this period, and what I plan for the next few months. Any questions or comments please get in touch at david.burden21@bathspa.ac.uk.

Frighteningly I'm now only 6 months away from submission - where did all the time go?! It's been a busy first half of the year, completing desk research and game design, and getting not only the first formal draft of the thesis completed, but also the draft of another book done - see later! The desk research was to go through the rules of over 100 of the "better" urban games (about half of which I've fully played) and capture the mechanics they use to represent the 70+ elements of my urban conflict [typology](#). This helps to confirm where the gaps are in game coverage - and will also provide a useful resource for game designers to see best practice and what sort of mechanics have been developed already by designers to represent the different parts of urban conflict.

In game design terms I have now finished the last two "PhD" games - *Brick by Bloody Brick* (B3B) and the *Rapid Urban Combat Kreisspiel Umpiring System* (RUCKUS). Whilst both can be played on maps, for learning and flexibility both can also be played on tiles which can be configured to create a variety of urban challenges. B3B is based around a platoon (possibly company) force and a 15m grid on 16cm (60m) tiles, and RUCKUS is for battalion/brigade ops and has 300m/10cm grid/tiles. One of the nice results is that one tile on RUCKUS is about the whole layout of a game of B3B. Both games were shown and played at DSET and COW during Jun/Jul, and the feedback has been very good. Apart from working on the final iteration of the thesis, my main plan for the next few months is to get RUCKUS up onto Tabletop Simulator and out on Print'n'Play by mid August, followed by B3B in September.

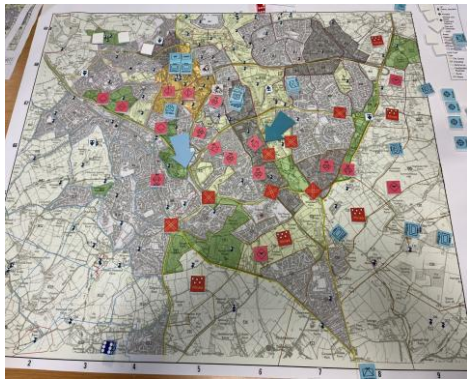
As a reminder, here is the final set of games that I've fully developed for the PhD (and aim to publish under a Creative Commons licence) in order to examine urban warfare from a variety of echelon and gaming perspectives. I'm still keen to get plays of the games, so if you're interested in playing any of the them, on or off line, either supported by me or as a blind playtester or just from existing downloads (Rubble Town and TUC) then do get in touch. Links on the website and all ethics and assessment forms are now on-line for easy completion.

The Urban Calculus 	TUC is a pol-mil view of urban conflict and aims to get players thinking about how military ops, political will, societal support and global opinion all interact - and what the effect is on innocent civilians.	OPUC 	OPUC is an operational level game. The initial scenario focuses on Estonia. Log is as important as combat, and to emphasise how urban fights have a logic all of their own, they transfer to separate "beer mat" micro-maps.
City & CEMA 	City & CEMA captures the breadth and depth of urban ops at Brigade level. It also majors on the USECT model - thinking about what happens before and after the battle.	RUCKUS 	RUCKUS represents the same scale battles as City & CEMA but in a fast-play format, and is designed as much to help an umpire run a seminar type game as to enable "out the box" player vs player games.
Brick By Bloody Brick 	B3B is a tactical game, typically with a reinforced platoon, and counters representing 2-5 man squads. Drones are explicitly represented, as are civilian effects.	Rubble Town 	Rubble Town is a solo card based game which provides an introduction to urban issues. The player builds their reinforced platoon and then tries to fight it down a city street against a variety of enemy positions & challenges.

My chapter on *Wargaming and The Just War* was published by Taylor & Francis in a new book on [Just War and Artificial Intelligence](#) in late 2025. My paper on *Building an Urban Wargames Database* was finally published in the [MORS Journal of Wargaming Volume 2](#). I also have a paper in review on The Representation of Civilians in Urban Wargames - let me know if you'd like a copy of the draft.

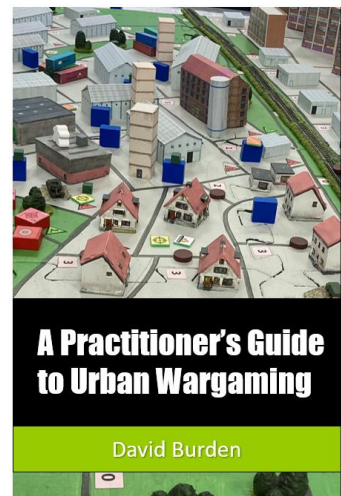
I've produced a number of working papers over the last six months which are now up on my web site, including: [The Derivation of Combat Factors](#), [Civilians in Urban Warfare](#) and [The Descent of a City - 20 Days in Mariupol](#) - an analysis of what is seen in the documentary of the same name in terms of the collapse of the city.

I presented at GUWS on [Wargaming and the Just War](#) last year, and I also took part in a [Soft Factors and Civilian Harm Mitigation and Reduction](#) (CHMR) panel at Connections Online in April - both available on YouTube.



In February John and I ran a set of wargames for NATO's ARRC HQ looking at the issues of Cultural Property Protection (CPP) on behalf of Newcastle University's Cultural Property Protection and Peace team, Blue Shield International, and the British Army Cultural Property Protection Unit. I was able to use one of my *City & CEMA* maps as the basis, and although the workshop was run seminar wargames style I had a draft of *RUCKUS* to see if I could keep up with the speed of the battle and cover the sorts of events that happened. The wargames also meant that CPP is now a feature of *RUCKUS*, and I may retrofit to other games. A report, book chapter and paper on the research are all underway.

Whilst the thesis (when it's properly finished and accepted) will be available for download from the BathSpa web site, it will not be in the most useful format or style - or full of the most useful information - for professional wargamers. To address that John has kindly agreed to publish *A Practitioner's Guide to Urban Wargaming* through The History of Wargaming Project. This will hopefully capture the most important information that I found, and my core thoughts, on urban wargaming in a way that is useful to people involved in the creation and commissioning of urban wargames - and even in other areas of wargaming. The initial chapter list (subject to change) is: *An Introduction to Urban Warfare; Urban Wargaming; Professional Urban Wargaming; Representing Population - Challenges, Solutions, Mechanics; Representing Infrastructure - Challenges, Solutions, Mechanics; Representing Urban Terrain - Challenges, Solutions, Mechanics; Wargaming the Liberal Dilemma; Designing Urban Wargames; and New Approaches To Urban Wargaming*. There will also be 6 appendices covering: *Ludography, Bibliography, Informative Urban Battles, Consolidated Urban Doctrine, Computerised Urban Wargaming* and an *Urban Wargame Design Checklist*.



We hope to get the book out before Christmas 2026 - so I can reference it in the thesis. Expect the next copy of this newsletter to effectively be the book launch announcement!

My key goals for the rest of 2026 are simply to:

- Get a few more evaluated plays of the games, especially *RUCKUS* and *Brick By Bloody Brick*.
- Complete the Practitioner's Guide.
- Submit the thesis!

Go to my [website](#) at www.taunoyen.com for working papers, presentations, my games, game reviews etc. I also (occasionally) post on Bluesky as [@urbanwargamer](#) and (more regularly) on LinkedIn as [David Burden](#). If you have any questions/comments/just want to chat then just email me at david@burden.name.