



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

War, play and games have long and interconnected histories. War has shaped the games people play, and militaries have used games for recruitment, planning and training.

War Games explores both the importance of gaming to military training and strategy, and the impact of conflict on games in popular culture. In addition to artifacts and audiovisual resources, the exhibition features five interactive experiences through which visitors can learn about the historical connections between war and games, and try their hand at a variety of war-themed games.

Major trends in wargaming are explored in five chronological zones, extending from ancient times to the present day.

ZONE 1

War and Games — From Antiquity to the Present

Games about war and battle have existed across different cultures for thousands of years. This zone introduces characteristics of early war games, with examples and images of ancient games. Many early games are still played today and may have influenced modern-day war games.

Sample objects and experiences:

- A 2,500-year-old decorated amphora (ceramic vessel) from the Royal Ontario Museum featuring Greek heroes of the Trojan War playing a game of skill.
- A game board and stones from the ancient strategy game Go, which originated in China and is still popular today.
- A chess set with traditional cornhusk doll game pieces created by Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) artist Angel Doxtater. The pieces represent the “elder brothers” of the Hodinohso:ni Confederacy — the Kanien'kehá:ka — made with purple flint-corn husks, and the Onödowá'ga (Seneca), made with white corn husks.

ZONE 2

The World Wars — 1914 to 1945

War games were used by military professionals to prepare battlefield strategies, while toys and war-themed games helped those at home feel connected with the war effort. This zone features a collection of war games from around the world that were played during the two world wars. The games and toys that found their way into homes reflected both the urgency of the conflict and the challenges faced by soldiers, sailors and pilots who were fighting the battles on land, at sea, and in the air.

Sample objects and experiences:

- *The Game of War*, used by British Army officers in the 1880s to simulate detailed operations, lent by the National Army Museum in the United Kingdom. Canada ordered similar war game sets from the British War Office in the years prior to the First World War.
- War-themed board games including *Extended Broadside*, which resembles the game *Battleship*; a Second World War British board game called *Black Out!*; and Japanese, German and French games that represent other perspectives on the conflicts.
- Toy soldiers from H. G. Wells's personal collection, styled after the infantry, cavalry and artillery units that fought in the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815).
- An immersive space based on the activities of the Second World War Western Approaches Tactical Unit (WATU) in Liverpool, England. With a convoy attack by a German U-boat plotted on the floor and a replica wooden screen through which it can be viewed, this section, together with supporting objects and a video, offers visitors a chance to explore WATU's groundbreaking work.
- *Atlantic Peril*, a custom-designed game activity inspired by naval wargaming during the Battle of the Atlantic. Visitors take on the role of an Allied naval commander to navigate a convoy of ships transporting vital supplies across the North Atlantic, battling U-boats at every turn.
- An adapted, playable version of a First World War board game, *Over There*. It captures elements of trench warfare in a simple two-player spin-and-move game.

ZONE 3

The Cold War — Gaming the Unimaginable

The threat of nuclear war felt real during the Cold War, as the United States and the Soviet Union increased their stockpiles of nuclear weapons. War games allowed militaries to simulate potential conflict scenarios safely and helped the public explore the violence of war in an era where the fear of a deadly third world war was ever present. Computer games also became mainstream, giving the public another means to explore war.

Sample objects and experiences:

- A first edition of the popular role-playing game, *Dungeons and Dragons*.
- One of the 500 original sets of the *Dunn-Kempf* U.S. Army simulation game — a map-based game played with miniatures and used by the American army to simulate a “Red” Soviet attack against “Blue” American forces in Germany.
- An operator console used by personnel at the Canadian Forces Base North Bay Underground Complex to monitor Canadian airspace for hostile or unidentified aircraft, that helped coordinate interceptions by RCAF aircraft.
- An opportunity for visitors to play *Missile Command* using a replica of the original Atari joystick.
- A visitor response area inviting visitors to share their wargaming experiences or favourite games.

ZONE 4

Games and the War on Terrorism — 2001–2014

The end of the Cold War gave way to a series of conflicts that threatened world security. An unexpected threat emerged when terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. The military response to those attacks and the increased public security measures in many countries became known as the “war on terror.” Popular culture, including video games, reflected, questioned and promoted the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Contemporary war games explored the conflicts of that time and the moral questions that accompanied them.

Sample objects and experiences:

- A display featuring several weapons that frequently appear in first-person shooter video games, including an SVD Dragunov sniper rifle (featured in more than 70 games), an Uzi submachine gun (more than 40 video games), and an Ak-47 rifle (more than 70 video games).
- Visuals and artwork from some of the most popular war-themed game franchises, including *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor*.
- *Killbox*, an interactive art installation created by artist and activist Joseph DeLappe and the U.K.’s Biome Collective, that gives visitors a chance to critically explore drone warfare.
- *Fantasy and Reality*, a video featuring two Canadian veterans who explain how the games they play differ from their wartime experiences. Visitors can compare helmet-cam scenes of combat in Afghanistan to sequences from the video game *Call of Duty*.
- *America’s Army Action Figure*, a work by activist and artist Joseph DeLappe criticizing the use of games as a recruitment tool.
- *RCN Heroes*, a simulation game developed by the Canadian Armed Forces as a recruitment tool that challenges visitors to steer a ship, avoiding obstacles, and safely dock it in Halifax Harbour.

- A mannequin displaying a Canadian Armed Forces weapons effects simulator, worn by Canadian soldiers during military exercises.

ZONE 5

Gaming Global Insecurity — 2014 to the Present

The final zone in the exhibition explores how present-day game scenarios address complex problems, such as the shifting balance of global power, climate change, and pandemics. Today's defence professionals turn to war games to analyze and play through future scenarios, while game developers and gaming franchises continue to explore past and imaginary wars to help the public understand modern conflicts.

Sample objects and experiences:

- *Pandemic*, a board game developed after the 2003 SARS epidemic.
- *Aftershock*, a Canadian-designed game that explores the aftermath of a hypothetical earthquake in a fictional country.
- A mixed-media drawing of Major (now Lieutenant-Colonel) Trisha MacLeod, a military health care specialist who helped provide care to COVID-19 patients in long-term care homes in Ontario in 2020.
- A copy of the popular society game *Settlers of Catan*, which motivates players to compete with each other through trade and building, rather than through conflict or warfare.
- A flip-panel interactive presenting dilemmas faced by the main character in the mobile game *Bury Me, My Love*. Players discover the challenges encountered by a refugee who escapes war-torn Syria and tries to reach Europe.