

# KRIEGSSPIEL HANDBOOK



Playing & Umpiring war-games in the  
original style online.

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[www.kriegsspiel.org](http://www.kriegsspiel.org)  
<https://discord.gg/YcwtSh5rQg>

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# HOW DO I USE THIS BOOK?

***If about to Play for the first time, read only Section II.***

***If about to Umpire for the first time, read only Section III.***

Otherwise read this book however you like. I suggest reading each section in order :)

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More to come in future versions!

# I. INTRODUCTION

Military officers in Prussia before 1814 trained in schools as well as on staff rides. A staff ride was an imagination exercise where the officers and their teachers would ride around the country on horses imagining battle scenarios and quizzing each other on what the right decision would be.

However, the Prussians weren't happy with their performance in the Napoleonic Wars and revised officer training. Staff rides and field exercises were expensive and relied on good weather. Officers needed field experience but without leaving the academy. It was around this time, in 1824, that Captain von Reisswitz published the game Kriegsspiel.

This version of Kriegsspiel was a board game designed to simulate war using scale maps, wooden blocks, dice, and an Umpire or Referee to handle rules issues and hidden information. The result was a combination of traditional instruction (the rules and Umpire-teacher) with the freedom and imagination aspects of Staff Rides, all in a package that could be played indoors during the winter.

Though never officially adopted by the Prussian government it caught on. By 1830 it seemed like everyone was making their own version. Some updated the rules with new technologies like telegraphs and rifled cannons. Others found the rules cumbersome and put more faith in the Umpire's personal judgment.

It's rare to play the original version anymore, even for us. But what has survived common to all versions is a game where players take on the role of military officers. They must plan and play out a battle while Umpires determine the success

of their actions, introduce the unexpected, and limit their information to maintain a realistic experience.

The form we play today is a board game with Players and Umpires. As a player you'll be a military officer trying to achieve some goal. We enjoy big battles where you control thousands of men in combat and maneuver, but we've also seen skirmish actions, campaign operations, and even diplomatic summits or natural disaster response. Games can be set in any era, but sometime between 1700 and 1870 is the most common.

Regardless of scale or setting, you'll play alongside and against other players in the same predicament. As the game progresses you can keep track of what's happening on your own private map. Your map won't match anyone else's since Kriegsspiel is a game of incomplete information - it will only contain the information that you know.

Once the game starts you'll interact with an Umpire each turn. They'll tell you what is happening around you and ask what actions you take in response. The only limit to what you can try is your imagination and what the Umpires judge to be realistic. The most common actions are giving orders to your troops, moving yourself and your staff, and writing messages to other players.

After you tell the Umpire what you want to do they'll leave to determine what happens using the game rules, their personal judgment, and the Umpire Map, which contains the true game state. When they're ready they'll come back and tell you how the game has developed as a result of your actions. You'll take new actions and this repeats until the game reaches a conclusion or time runs out. Finally, the Umpires reveal the major events of the game to all players and provide an

evaluation of their play.

The evolution of Kriegsspiel style gaming from strict military exercise to civilian hobby isn't surprising: Kriegsspiel is the common ancestor of all modern war-games and role-playing games. The versions we play today are as entertaining as they are educational and are by no means limited to the military. We look forward to you joining us!

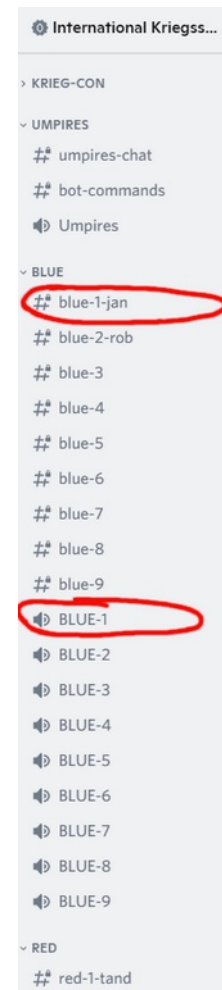
## II. HOW DO I PLAY MY FIRST GAME?

The typical online game of Kriegsspiel in the International Kriegsspiel Society uses two tools: **Discord** and **Tabletop Simulator**. You need Discord. Tabletop simulator is helpful as a place to keep your own personal map but is not required to play.

Discord is used to communicate with the Umpires and other Players. Right now we like to hang out in the Lobby channel before games start. For the game itself you'll have your own **text channel** and probably your own **voice channel**, too.

You might start in a channel together with your team to plan your initial strategy but usually you'll be moved to an individual channel when the first turn of the game begins. This is because most Kriegsspiel games are set in the days before radio or telephones, so communicating with other players is a major challenge of the game. Do not talk directly to the other players during the game unless an Umpire says to. Generally if you meet up with another player's character during the game you'll be put in a channel to have a chat with them as long as you remain together.

In the text channel you'll receive some or



*Example paired text and voice channels.*

all of the following types of messages: **timestamps**, **screenshots**, **explanations**, and **dispatches**.

A **timestamp** is the current time in the

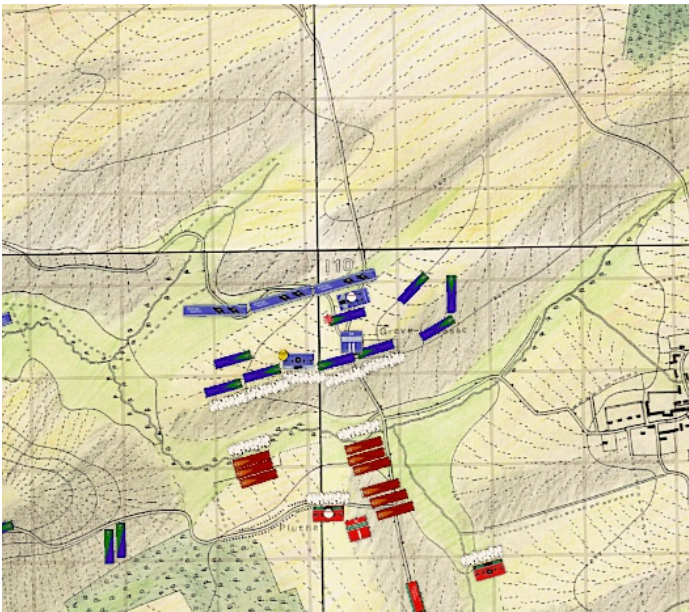


*A typical update might look like this. Note the time (08:45), screenshot, and dispatch arriving from your teammate General Chrono.*



game. Games are usually turn-based, with two phases per turn (one for you to receive updates and take actions and one for Umpires to resolve them). Usually a timestamp will look something like “08:45 --”. In this case it would be 8:45 in the morning. 10-20 minute turns are typical.

A **screenshot** is a direct capture of the game map and assets from the master game table kept by the Umpires. It is mostly reliable information based primarily on what you have seen with your own eyes since last turn.



*A typical screenshot showing troops (colored blocks), signs of combat (smoke), and reports of how the battle is going (colored dots). Three of these nine Red infantry blocks were inserted by the Umpires to throw off the Blue Player's accounting of enemy strength in this particular case. It's hard to count the enemy through the smoke!*

Umpire **explanations** can be delivered by text or aloud. They're additional information besides what the screenshot shows, like the sounds of distant cannon fire, the status of the units under your command, and just generally what happened since the last update. For instance, an Umpire may describe troops you see a long way off whose identity isn't

known well enough to be included in a screenshot.

**Dispatches** are messages from other players. These will arrive after an appropriate period of time has elapsed, usually a minimum of one turn. Ask your Umpire for the best way to send dispatches to other players. Usually that's just writing it in your text channel using a template like this:

**Recipient:** [Person to receive message & their expected location]

**Location:** [Your Location]

**Time:** [Current Time]

[Message]

[Appropriate period sign-off],  
[Your name]

However, before you write any dispatches you should ask your Umpire any questions you have. Many players wonder about things like how to read the map or what their pieces represent. Part of the Umpire's job is to answer these kinds of questions to the best of their ability.

With your most pressing questions answered you should now tell the Umpire what you'd like each of the units under your command to do in broad strokes. For instance, if you are a division general you might command brigades of soldiers and batteries of cannons. So your orders might be something like “I want First Brigade to take this hill in front of us and once we have it I'll deploy my cannons on top. Keep Second in reserve to take over the attack from First Brigade if they're driven back.” Be careful not to forget about troops just because they aren't in your screenshot! That often happens to players who control cavalry or large supply trains.

Once these things are taken care of the

Umpire will leave to execute your orders. You'll have until they return to ponder your situation and write dispatches to other players on your team. Then you'll receive a whole new update and repeat this process until the game ends.

If you have Tabletop Simulator then you can host your own private table by subscribing to one of our modules on the Steam Workshop. Using Tabletop Simulator in this way isn't required but a lot of players find it helpful to keep track of the game state. If your Umpire allows, you can also use this to show them what you intend to do on your turn by streaming your table to them or posting a screenshot in your text channel. Do not join the Umpires' server on Tabletop Simulator or share a server with the other players unless instructed to do so by an Umpire.

Finally, a brief note about the Umpires and playing Kriegsspiel in general. The Umpires will try to make sure your first game goes smoothly. But it's also their job to make you feel the pressure a real officer would feel in battle. It's normal to feel flustered in your first game. That is how people in battle feel!

You might feel isolated by too little information or overwhelmed by too much of it. One player might send you frivolous dispatches, another might vanish on turn one and you'll see nothing of them until the game is over. You won't be sure if your orders are too detailed or too simple. You'll be tempted to micro-manage even though this takes your attention away from the overall battle developing around you.

Learning to deal with these problems in Kriegsspiel is what makes it more than just a game - it's also a training exercise in the most critical facets of being a real military officer! A tough first game is normal. It's rare to make no mistakes, even for good

players.

Umpires will halt the game if the outcome becomes obvious, there are no interesting problems left to explore for the players, or you simply run out of time. At that point you'll usually be invited to view the true game state on the Umpire Table. The Umpires will explain the events of the game including the problems encountered and solutions attempted by different players. We usually like to let the Lead Umpire go first, then Assistant Umpires, then players before opening it up to general discussion. The debriefing is a chance to learn and improve your play, discuss any issues you had during play, and to just decompress and talk about the game with the other players.

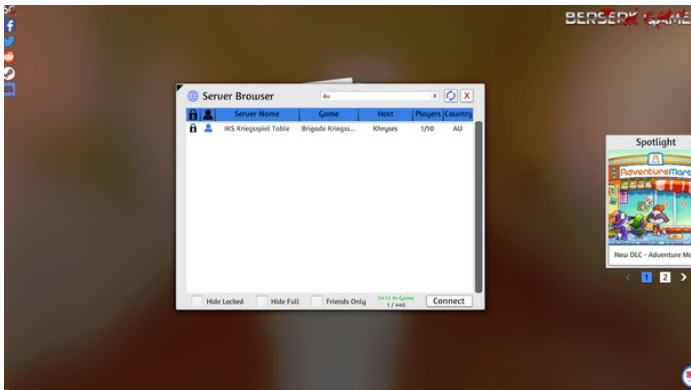
That'll be your first Kriegsspiel down, hopefully many more to go! Good luck, commander!

### III. HOW DO I UMPIRE MY FIRST GAME?

The normal structure of a Kriegsspiel game is separated between **Players** and **Umpires**. Umpires know the real state of the game on their private Umpire Table. Their job is to maintain the fog of war for the players while executing player orders as realistically as possible. You will need both **Discord** and **Tabletop Simulator** to help Umpire most of our games.

Only one of the Umpires needs to actually know the rules. They're called the **Lead Umpire**. Their job is to coordinate the Umpires, keep the game moving quickly, and resolve ambiguous situations like combat using a combination of the game rules and their personal judgment. For your first game you will not be the Lead Umpire, you'll be an **Assistant Umpire**.

Start by joining the game on Tabletop Simulator with the other Umpires.



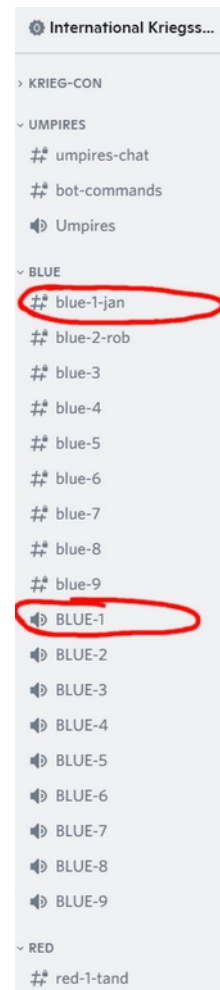
Click “Join” then search for the server name the Lead Umpire gives you. Hit “Connect” and type in the password (if any). This table is only for Umpires until the game ends.

You’ll need to pick a color to interact with the table. Gray (spectator) won’t work, but any other color is fine. If you ever want to change your color you can click your name in the top right and click “Change Color”. Then look around the table for colored dots and click the color you want.



An example of what it looks like to change or assign yourself a player color in Tabletop Simulator. Any of these work except the gray dot(s) in the middle.

During game setup you’ll be assigned to a couple players. You’ll work with these players for the duration of the game. Each player will usually have a **text channel** and a **voice channel**.



Example paired text and voice channels. In this case “Blue-1” is Jan’s channel while Blue-2 is Rob’s.

Generally our games are turn-based. Turns usually represent 10-20 minutes of time and have two phases: **Player Phase** and **Umpire Phase**.

During the first Player Phase you may be asked to deliver a mission briefing to the players. This briefing includes a description of their current situation and goals and usually also a **screenshot** of each player’s force.

We often use screenshots of the Umpire Table to send players accurate information quickly. Here are some different ways to take and deliver screenshots our members like right now.

One of the most popular ways lately is to use the **Snipping Tool / Snip & Sketch**



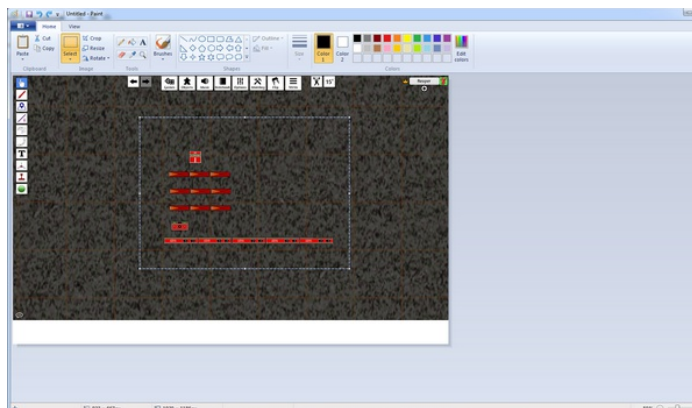
built into Windows. On Windows 10 you can access this tool using the keyboard shortcut "Windows Key + Shift + S". The tool will capture part or all of your screen to your PC clipboard and you can paste it directly into Discord using the usual right click -> paste or "Ctrl + V" keyboard shortcut. "Shift + Command + 4" and "Shift + Command + 5" work similarly in recent versions of MacOS.

Another method is to copy your whole screen and paste it into an image editing program. On most Windows keyboards you can find this function on a key called "Print Screen" (or sometimes "PrtSc" or "PS", often near the arrow keys or F1-F12 on most keyboards). The MacOS equivalent is "Shift + Command + 3".

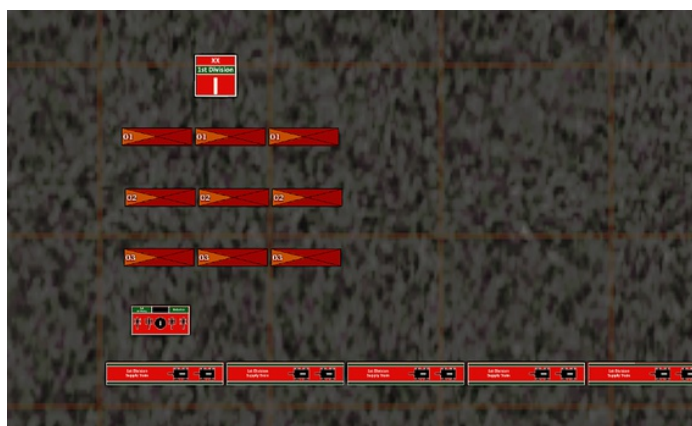
At this point if you pasted (ctrl+v for Windows users or cmd+v for MacOS) this information into a player's text channel it might look something like this:



Usually you won't want to paste your whole screen like this. You can crop your screenshot by pasting it into the image editor of your choice. For instance, Microsoft Paint:



Use the "select" tool to draw a box around the area you want to show, then hit copy (ctrl+c for Windows users) or cut (ctrl+x for Windows users). Then you can paste the selection to the player's text channel.



*The end result.*

If you do need more help picking a method that's right for you we'd be glad to help on Discord, but for now let's move on.

Typically Player Phase reports include screenshots as you've already seen, but once the game starts they also include a **timestamp**, **verbal report**, and **dispatches**.



*What a typical update might look like. Note the time (08:45), screenshot, and dispatch arriving from General Chrono to General Tzarina.*

The timestamp is the current game time. Include this in every report you deliver. For instance, “**07:30 --**” tells the player the information they’re about to receive is about the situation as of 7:30 in the morning. Usually we use 24 hour time to avoid ambiguity (e.g. 13:45 is 1:45 in the afternoon). You can format text as bold by putting it **\*\*inside double asterisks\*\*** on Discord.

After the timestamp you should paste the player’s screenshot. The briefing is usually just a picture of their forces, but on the typical game turn you’ll show the player an area around their avatar. Consult the Lead Umpire for what should be visible on a given turn. For instance, you might not include an area the player can’t see because of a forest, increase the area since they’re on a hilltop, or include extra pieces that don’t even exist to simulate the difficulty of counting the enemy.

After your players have their timestamp and screenshot you may need to deliver dispatches. Dispatches are messages from one player to another carried by a courier who must traverse the battlefield. Unless told otherwise, assume you are responsible for delivering the dispatches your players write to their recipient - whoever they are.



*When I went to deliver Jan’s 07:00 update I saw he had prepared a dispatch to his teammate Coontz while I was gone.*



*So I delivered it to Coontz with his 07:00 update.*

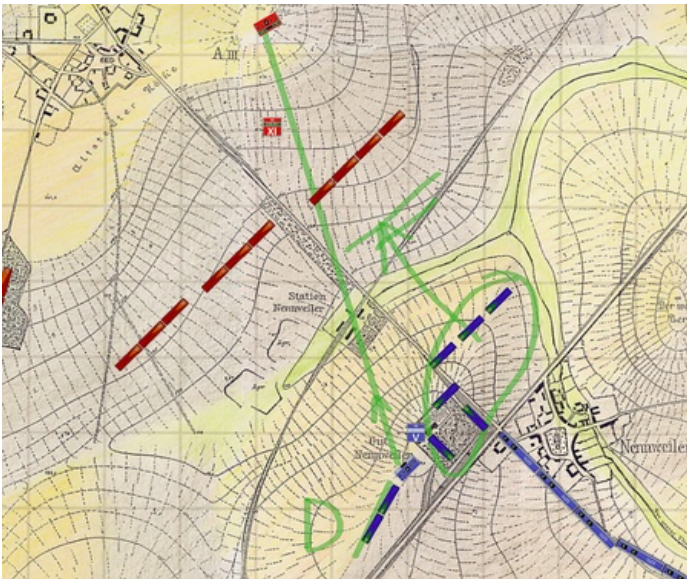
This is as simple as copying and pasting the message to the appropriate player’s channel. I like to put messages “inside these tick marks” which will make them appear in a box on Discord so players can see them easily.

Encourage players to write dispatches after they ask you questions and deliver their orders. When you return from the Umpire Phase you’ll often find dispatches waiting for you. Most of these should be delivered with that next update (as I did above). If the recipient is very far away, or enemy forces are between the writer and recipient, you should ask the Lead Umpire what to do. If they ask you to delay the message then be sure to make a note for yourself. It’s very easy to entirely forget about delayed messages by mistake!

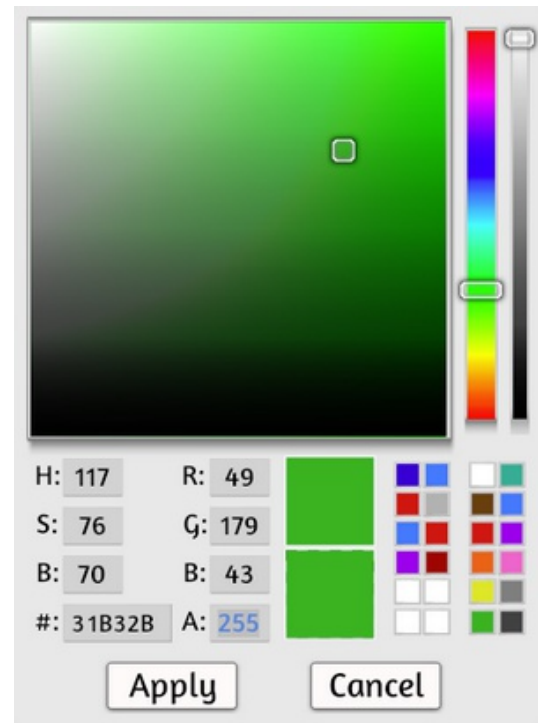
Having delivered timestamps, screenshots, and dispatches you should visit your first player’s voice channel to tell them any other information they should know and to see if they have any questions. Repeat this until you’ve done so for all of your players. Then return to the first player for orders, then the next player, and so on until you have all your players’ orders.

One good way to take orders is to be tabbed into Tabletop Simulator so you can draw the player’s orders as they explain them to you in their voice channel. *Beware players trying to tell you their life story - questions and orders only!*





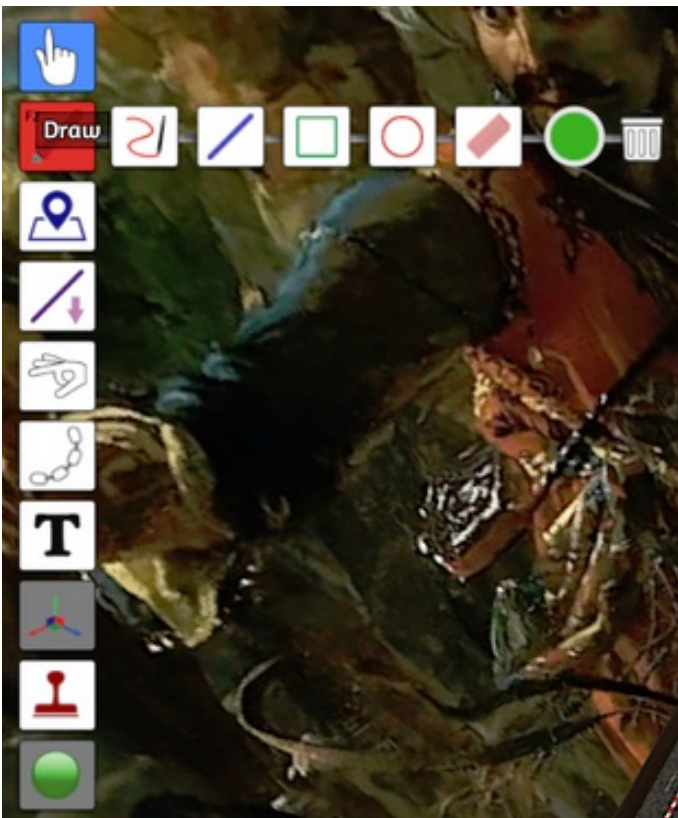
*Example orders for Blue 5th Division. They want to gather up their right wing and attack in two lines while their cannons attack Red's battery and their left wing defends the ridge. Every Umpire has their own personal notation but circles and lines for areas or units and arrows to indicate attacks or movement are a good start.*



*Setting the "A" (Alpha) value to below 255 makes your pen transparent so you can see the terrain under your marks. Around 230 is usually good.*

### **To summarize, each Player Phase you will:**

1. Deliver any mission briefing (once in the first phase of the game).
2. Give each player the current time in the game with a timestamp.
3. Provide a screenshot in accordance with Lead Umpire directives.
4. Deliver dispatches your players wrote to their recipients (rate ~15 squares/turn).
5. Take questions from each player.
6. Take orders from each player recording them onto the Umpire Table using the Draw Tool.



*Use the Draw Tool (F2) to make these lines on the map. Hit "+" or "-" to adjust your pen's size. Note the eraser doesn't work well and the Trash Can erases all lines from all participants. Clicking the colored circle opens the color picker panel (below).*

When you are ready with the orders from each of your players let the Lead Umpire know. Different Lead Umpires have different ways they'd like to be informed. Some use pieces on a turn tracker in Tabletop Simulator, some just want you to tell them verbally, others use Tabletop Simulator's "Take Turn" feature. Sometimes Lead Umpires will decide to work ahead, but usually they'll wait for all the Assistant Umpires to be ready before moving to **Umpire Phase**.

During Umpire Phase your job is to listen to the Lead Umpire and do what they say. They need to resolve points of conflict and make judgments, so they'll ask you what orders your players gave. The Lead Umpire will decide if they must personally resolve your players' actions. If there aren't any serious judgment calls to make, like if they're just marching down the road far away from any enemies, usually the Lead Umpire will tell you to move your players' pieces for them. At this point you should ask the Lead Umpire how far the pieces are supposed to move since these values frequently change depending on context.

In terms of measuring movement it can be helpful to use the **Line Tool** (shortcut: press and hold "Tab"). Be sure to hover over the tool in the top left and set it to "Units" instead of "Inches" first so it measures map grid squares properly.

If you do unexpectedly run into a situation where a judgment call is needed while you resolve the movement of your players' pieces you should alert the Lead Umpire.

Finally, once all of your players' pieces are accounted for and you are ready to move to the next Player Phase you should alert the Lead Umpire. Once all Umpire Phase actions are resolved they will tell you the new game time and tell you to issue new updates to your players.

This cycle will continue until the game ends, so you now know everything you need to know. Umpiring a game is its own kind of fun compared to playing, and many people say they like doing both. You have more to do every turn, which some people find more engaging. You get the satisfaction of being responsible for putting on a good game for everyone. And best of all you get a front row seat with all the other Umpires to watch and discuss all the players' decisions as they make them without knowing what you know. Many of our players say the only real winners of Kriegsspiel are the Umpires because they get to watch the whole show.

Good luck fellow Umpire!

