

CFrag's

“Tickle” tcli

A tiny in-game CLI to automate DCS server missions

Version 1.1.0

2024-09-30



© 2024 by Christian Franz

1 What it is

“Tickle” is a tiny CLI (“Command-Line Interface” – the most primitive, yet also most efficient way to tell a computer what to do) that allows Eagle Dynamic’s DCS servers to

- *automatically rotate* missions in your 'server playlist' on a time basis (e.g. after 4 hours) and
- allow *specially authorized* players to interactively (via mission chat) change the currently running mission

In other words, you can set up your server ‘play list’ with 5 missions, set the cycle time to 2 hours, and then the server changes the active mission every 2 hours to another mission from that play list. This can help you to keep your server ‘fresh’ for your players by serving up ever-changing missions automatically. For example, I set up a ‘helicopter’ themed server to cycle between six helicopter rescue sandboxes and change the active mission every 90 minutes.

Also, server owners (or players who are authorized) can change the currently playing mission simply by issuing a chat command (this requires the authorized person be on-line and inside the game).

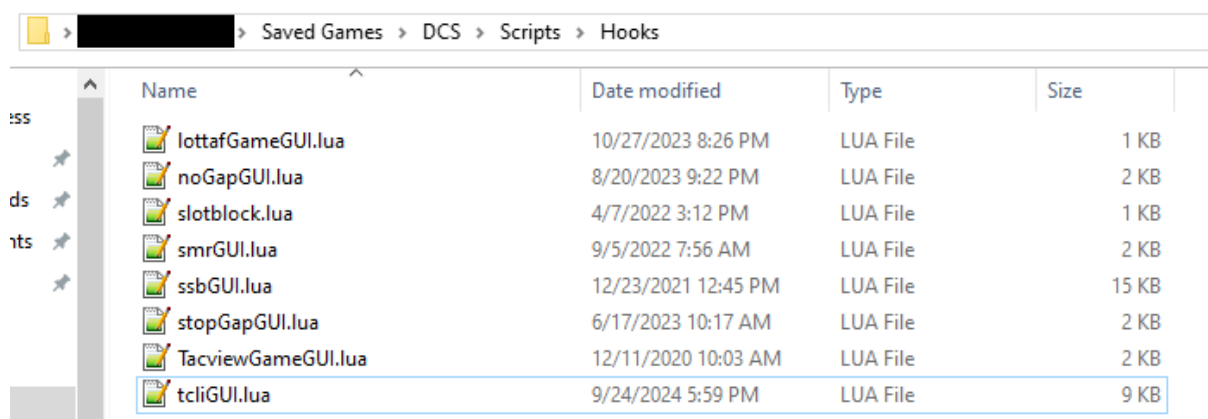
Note:

Tickle is a server enhancement and only works in DCS multiplayer / dedicated server.

2 Installation

Installation is once-only, and drag-and-drop:

1. Put the file `tcliGUI.lua` into your DCS/Scripts/Hooks folder
2. Restart DCS



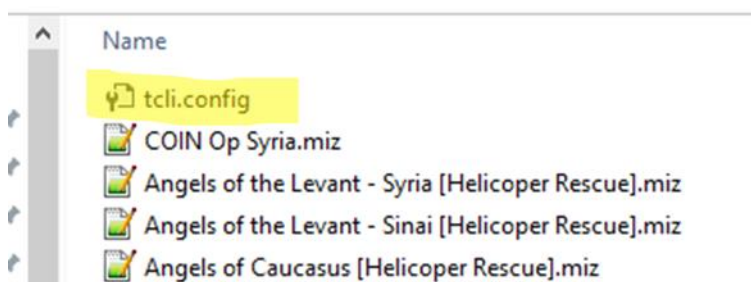
You now have installed Tickle on your computer. Its functions are only available in multiplayer (local and dedicated server). If you start a multiplayer session now, you won't see any change because although Tickle is active, it does not yet know you.

If you have a hosting provider for your DCS servers (e.g. Fox3), you may need to have them put the `tcliGUI.lua` file into the /Hooks folder for you.

3 Making someone special (authorized)

You need to tell Tickle who you are, and that it should accept your orders.

To do so, look into your **/Missions** directory and locate the file `tcli.config` (see the **yellow** markings in the image to the right). **It automatically appears in your /Missions as soon as DCS starts up after you install Tickle.** This config file contains the information that Tickle needs to recognize you (and other people whom you trust enough to control your server's mission sequence).



Use a text editing tool like "Notepad" or "Notepad++" to open `tcli.config`. There'll be some gibberish text that looks like this:

```
{ "mark": "-", "admins": [ "xk76hkl@01", "%tgJsgRG1<" ], "cycleTime": -1 }
```

There are two silly privileged usernames pre-configured:

- xk76hkl@01 (marked **yellow**)
- %tgJsgRG1< (marked **pink**)

Replace one of them (or both) with **your DCS on-line user name**, and save the file. My DCS username is (obviously) CFRAG, and so, to authorize myself (and leave the second name untouched) on my DCS server install, my `tcli.config` file looks like this:

```
{ "mark": "-", "admins": [ "CFRAG", "%tgJsgRG1<" ], "cycleTime": -1 }
```

i.e. I replaced **xk76hkl@01** with **CFRAG** (you **must** leave the quotes (“) before and after the name). Save the config file and start a new server mission. Note that unlike creaky old DCS, Tickle notices, and loads your changes. It does **not** require you to restart DCS, all you need to do is start a new multiplayer mission. As soon as the server loads a new mission, Tickle reloads `tcli.config` from your **/Missions** folder. If you changed the config file correctly, Tickle now recognizes you as an authorized player.

Let's try this. Enter the mission, open a chat window and enter the command

`"-?"` (without the quotes, return at the end)

If all went well, DCS responds (only to you) with a quick help screen that lists all commands, and tells you that currently, automatic mission changes are turned off.



If you don't see that response, you will have to re-edit the config file, save, and start a new multiplayer mission to reload `tcli.config`. Note that **usernames are case-sensitive** and therefore you must spell your DCS username exactly in the config file for Tickle to recognize you.

If you do not yet know your DCS username (it's the one you use to log into DCS), look at the chat window after you have typed a message. Your message always begins with your username.



Mine is CFRAG, all caps. Subtle, I know.

4 Tickle in-game Chat commands

Tickle provides you (and any other privileged user that you add to the config file) with some powerful chat commands to control the current mission.

Note:

All Tickle commands start with a hyphen "-".

To issue a command in a mission, enter chat as authorized player, and type in a command as listed below:

- `-?`
quick help and current automatic mission rotation status
- `-next`
run the next mission in the server mission playlist. Loops. Ignores current shuffle setting
- `-prev` or `-previous`
run previous mission from playlist. Loops. Ignores current shuffle setting
- `-restart`
re-start this mission
- `-random`
run a random mission from your server mission playlist
- `-pause`
pauses the current mission. This stops mission time
- `-play`
un-pauses the current mission. This continues mission time
- `-shuffle`
Turns on mission shuffling, randomizing the next mission when the `cycleTime` timer runs down
- `-seq` or `-sequence`
Turns off shuffling of missions when the `cycleTime` timer runs down.
- `-cycleTime`
the big kahuna: automatic mission rotation See below
- `-cycle`
Immediately cycle to the next mission (observes shuffle settings)

Whenever you (or any other authorized user) give Tickle a command in DCS chat, it is **not** broadcast, and only you receive any answers. This is intentional: for added security, nobody can see who gives what commands to Tickle.

5 Tickle automatic mission Rotation

One of Tickle's main features is that it can automatically rotate missions on your server after some time (e.g. 2 hours) elapses. This feature is mainly for dedicated servers that run "endless" sandbox-type missions to automatically rotate through a roster of missions and provide greater variety to players. Tickle uses your server's mission roster and respects the "shuffle" flag (meaning: if shuffle is enabled in your server mission list, Tickle chooses missions in random order, else they are chosen in sequence).

To turn on automatic mission rotation, issue the command `-cycleTime` and supply the number of minutes each cycle lasts. For example:

```
-cycleTime 240
```




[18:26:00] [Allies] CFRAG: ENABLED automatic mission change after 240 minutes

tells Tickle that it should change the currently running every 240 minutes (=4 hours).

Tickle automatically saves your cycleTime settings to storage and keeps them between DCS restarts. When you issue the `-cycleTime <amount>` command, that time interval is measured against the time when the mission started (i.e. it includes the time that already has passed in the current mission). So, if you are in hour 3 of your mission, and you give a cycle time of 120 (=2 hours), the mission cycles immediately.

To find out how much time is left in a cycle, issue the `-cycleTime` command without any parameters, e.g.

```
-cycleTime
```



[18:27:14] [Allies] CFRAG: AUTOMATIC MISSION CHANGE AFTER 240 MINUTES -- now scheduled in 237.33 MIN:SS

If cycleTime is active and nearing the end, there is a warning broadcast 5 and 1 minutes before the mission changes.



[20:14:34] [All] Fox3: THIS MISSION ENDS IN MINUTE

To turn off mission rotation, provide a cycleTime of 0 (zero), e.g.

```
-cycleTime 0
```

You can always check on the current cycle status by either giving the `'-?'` command or telling tcli `'-cycleTime'` (without a number).

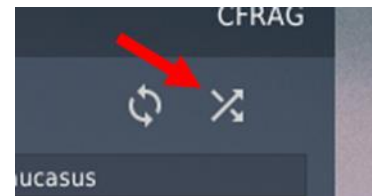
Note:

Tickle automatically rotates to the next mission after sufficient **MISSION TIME** elapses. A *paused* mission freezes mission time, so when a server is set to automatically pause after the last client leaves, that server **will not rotate** missions unless clients return and the time finally runs down with players present. Set your server to "Resume on Load" to ensure that your server continues to run the mission after the last client has disconnected.

To rotate now, issue the `-cycle` chat command from within the mission.

6 Randomizing missions

If you are local/ad-hoc-hosting your missions, you have the option to turn on 'shuffling' of missions on your playlist. If you enable that option, Tickle automatically randomizes the next mission whenever cycleTime runs down.

**WARNING:**

Some of ED's GUI people appear to possess lamentably low UX skills. In the current ad-hoc server GUI metaphor, a *white* symbol signifies that the option is *on* (enabled), while a blue symbol means that it is off, disabled. It's just the way DCS rolls, I guess.

Some dedicated server web GUIs may not provide this option, making it inaccessible to dedicated servers.

Tickle to the rescue: you can interactively use the `"-shuffle"` and `"-sequence"` commands to turn on and disable shuffling, respectively. This is also saved to the server's configuration, so it will persist through server restarts, and of course also works for local/ad-hoc-hosted missions (here the GUI will reflect the current shuffle setting if you changed it interactively)

To turn off shuffling, issue the `"-seq"` or `"-sequence"` command interactively (or use the GUI for local/ad-hoc hosted missions)

7 Advanced Uses

Tickle supports multiple (unlimited even) privileged users. By default, Tickle provides you with two users in its `tcli.config` file:

```
["xk76hkl@01", "%tgJsgRG1<"]
```

Inside those square brackets you can change the "names" inside the quotes. And you can add many more, simply by adding a comma "," and another name in quotes for each. For example, this is how the config looks if it was to support four users named "Iceman", "DingHe", "Suppa" and "Lil' me":

```
{"mark": "-","admins":["Iceman","DingHe","Suppa","Lil' me"],"cycleTime":-1}
```

8 Closing Remarks

I hope that you and your players enjoy Tickle and that it helps you to offer more, and more fun missions on your server(s) for other people to enjoy.

Enjoy!

Zürich, Fall of 2024,

-Ch