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**War Through the Eyes of the Toy Soldier:
A Material Study of the Legacy and Impact of Conflict 1880 – 1945**

Euan Loarridge
University of Glasgow
Email: Euan.Loarridge@gmail.com

Abstract:

Cast-lead toy soldiers enjoyed widespread popularity in Western society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As such they present an excellent case study for an analysis of war through non-military narratives. This article examines a sample of sets and figures produced during the 'golden age' of toy soldiers, so as to ascertain how these artefacts related to military developments and what light they can shed on societal responses to conflict in this period. The figures and sets under discussion are drawn from the catalogues of the major British and German manufacturers of the period and are contextualised by the activities of the companies that produced them. This focus enables the article to compare and contrast various approaches to these artefacts and to conclude on how toy soldier production in this period became embroiled in the wider political and military conflict between the British and German empires.

Introduction:

The term 'toy soldier' relates to a variety of different artefacts; perhaps the most iconic of these being the cast-lead figurines produced in Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Manufactured primarily in Western Europe, these figurines were exported across the world in pre-painted sets representing the historical and contemporary armies of the major European empires. By 1910, the demand for these items had grown to the point where William Britains, the UK's leading manufacturer, was shipping over 200,000 figures a week from their London factory (Grubb 1910, 750). Indeed, Kenneth Brown (1990, 237), one of the principal scholars of these artefacts, has noted that the UK experienced something of a 'toy soldier craze' in the decades preceding the First World War.

This craze was not, however, limited to the UK, nor to the turn of the twentieth century. Two-dimensional flat *Zinnfiguren* had been popular in Germany since the 1770s and three-dimensional hollow-cast figures continued to be produced in the UK until the mid-1960s. By 1931, these figurines had come to occupy such an intrinsic position in Western society that American sociologist Paul Furfey (1931, 106) regarded the desire to play with a 'set of toy soldiers' as indicative of mental development in young boys. The cultural impact of the cast-lead toy soldier is arguably still felt today in products like green-plastic army men, wargaming miniatures and high-quality military models for collectors.

The prevalence of toy soldiers in late 19th and early 20th century society, coupled with their close connection to the military, makes them an ideal subject for a discussion of what non-military artefacts can reveal about conflict. Aspects such as the subject, manufacture, release and usage of toy soldiers can identify how the production of these objects responded to military developments and reflected contemporary social

1 reactions to warfare. Furthermore, by placing these artefacts into the context of the
2 histories of the companies which made them, it is possible to demonstrate how the toy
3 soldier industry became an active participant in wider political and military conflict.
4 Indeed, it could be said that the competition between British and German
5 manufacturers in this period was a ‘war through other stuff’.

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7 The cast-lead toy soldier has appeared in a series of academic studies focused on the
8 interaction between children and conflict. Both Rosie Kennedy (2014) and Rachel
9 Duffett (2016) examined these artefacts in their explorations of the child’s experience
10 of the First World War. Previously, Brown (1990) had identified a connection
11 between the production of toy soldiers and rising militarism in Edwardian Britain. His
12 conclusions were echoed by Patrick Regan (1994) and Jeffrey Goldstein (1998) who
13 drew correlations between the increased sale of these items and a heightened sense of
14 militarism in American children. In Germany, David Hamlin (2007, 41) demonstrated
15 that these objects were ‘valued as an instrument of teaching proper male values’ to
16 young boys. Meanwhile, Graham Dawson (1994, 235) associated toy soldiers with the
17 nurseries of the middle and upper classes, where they embodied messages of
18 masculinity, militarism and national identity. Despite a general acknowledgement that
19 these artefacts were also consumed by adults, the last thirty years of academic
20 analysis of toy soldiers has been conducted almost exclusively through the lens of
21 childhood.
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26 This focus on the child’s response to conflict has potentially limited our
27 understanding of the multiple ways in which these artefacts were used and interpreted.
28 It could, in fact, be argued that toy soldiers were as popular amongst adults in this
29 period as they were amongst children. There is evidence of a market of adult
30 collectors who admired them for their ‘perfect modelling and colouring’ (*Athletic
31 Sports, Games and Toys* 1896, 9). A 1905 article in the *London Evening Times*
32 reported that at least one British Secretary of War collected toy soldiers so that ‘he
33 might perfect his knowledge of matters military’ (December 22, 1905, 3). There is
34 also ample evidence that adults used these objects as part of the growing hobby of
35 miniature wargaming, which was first popularised in Germany, but quickly spread to
36 the UK, with public figures like Robert Louis Stevenson, C.P. Trevelyan and Winston
37 Churchill being keen players (See Shuuman 2017, 445; Wells 1967, 76).
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42 Despite the assertion that ‘the doll is the universal plaything of the girl’ and ‘the toy
43 soldier the natural toy for boys’, it is clear that women also interacted with these
44 objects (Daiken 1953, 137-9). Postcards of the early 20th century regularly depicted
45 young girls playing with toy soldiers (Petrulis 2012), and H.G. Wells (2015, 7) wrote
46 that ‘a few rare and gifted women’ would be interested in miniature wargaming.
47 Furthermore, while sets of toy soldiers were generally quite expensive, they
48 nevertheless spread outside the upper and middle classes through the provision of
49 cheaper ranges such as the Britains’ B-series figures and through the second-hand
50 market (See Wallis 2017, 279-304). Therefore, while young boys may have formed
51 the most prominent target for toy soldier advertising, these artefacts actually enjoyed a
52 much wider audience across society.
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57 Adult and female interactions with toy soldiers are not the only underdeveloped
58 themes in the current scholarship. Despite Duffett’s observation that ‘the material
59 culture of childhood has left its mark’ (2016, 240), most of the current academic study
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Figure 1: 'Showing the war game in the open air', adults using toy soldiers for miniature wargames in H.G. Well's *Little Wars*, c.1913. Project Gutenberg.

of these objects has focused on documentary records, such as childhood memoirs, magazine articles and contemporary advertisements. The analysis of the physical figures and sets that were produced in this period has thus far been left to collectors. James Opie (1987; 1993; 2016) and Joe Wallis (1993; 2017) have carried out extensive reviews of the sets produced by William Britains of London, identifying when specific sets were released and discontinued. While a lack of surviving documentation precludes a similar analysis of German manufacturers, Hans Roer (1993) and Markus Grein (2003) have nevertheless developed overviews of the surviving figures produced by companies such as Georg Heyde of Dresden and Ernst Heinrichsen of Nuremberg. However, these publications represent more of a frame of reference for the modern collector than an academic body of work.

The current scholarship's reliance on documentary records, the majority of which have been obtained from English language sources, has also resulted in a rather Anglo-centric view of the toy soldier during this period. This overlooks the fact that German manufacturers occupied a significant share of the international toy market. Indeed, by 1890, 50 percent of all toy imports to the UK came from Germany (Brown 1996, 65). Furthermore, Brown also admitted that the toy soldier craze he identified in Edwardian Britain may have been inspired by the import of German made figures by major department stores like Paynes and Sons of London (1990, 238). Critically, this Anglo-centrism encourages the assumption that British responses towards toy soldiers were mirrored in other countries. In fact, Germany and the UK developed markedly different approaches to toy soldier production, which resulted in distinct social reactions to the subjects that these objects depicted.

The absence of a material study that examines toy soldiers as artefacts demonstrates that there is scope for further analysis of their relationship with conflict. This article will focus its discussion on a sample of sets and figures that were made available between 1880 and 1945 - the so called 'golden age' of the cast-lead toy soldier (Opie 2016, 108; Balkin 1997, 395). To ensure a broad assemblage of artefacts from across this period, examples will be drawn primarily from the surviving material produced by the two leading manufacturers of the time, Georg Heyde of Dresden and William



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Figure 2: Two images contrasting an average 60mm three-dimensional solid figure by Gebrüder Heinrich of Fürth (left in both images) with a typical 30mm two-dimensional flat by Ernst Heinrichsen of Nuremberg (right in both images). Author's image, private collection.

Britains of London. The former company was, from 1880 until 1914, the world's largest exporter of toy soldiers and from 1918 onwards this title passed to the latter (Roer 1993, 19). By examining figures from both British and German manufacturers, it is possible to not only compare different responses to conflict, but also to place these artefacts into the context of the growing rivalry between the British and German Empires. Both Britains and Heyde became participants in this wider conflict between their parent countries and ultimately found their fortunes intrinsically linked to its outcome.

Before moving on to discuss specific sets and figures, it is worth identifying that there were actually two distinct types of cast-lead toy soldier in production during this period. The first type was the traditional two-dimensional flat (right in Figure 2), which began to replace carved wooden figures in the late 18th century. Casting flat figures involved engraving an image onto two pieces of slate. These pieces were then bound together to create a mould into which molten lead was poured (Taylor 1995, 22-3). The two-dimensional nature of flats meant that they could easily recreate popular artwork in miniature (Mannack 2008, 574). This in turn inspired the creation of sets that were designed to be displayed as vignettes or dioramas, a feature which became distinctive amongst German manufacturers.

Yet, by the end of the 19th century, the flat toy soldier was largely superseded by the three-dimensional solid figure (left in Figure 2). Solid figures were created using a more durable brass mould which was cast around a master figure created by a sculptor (Garratt 1965, 182-5). As seen in Figure 2, the average solid figure was usually much larger than the typical flat. Although this meant that they required larger quantities of metal and so a higher retail price per figure, solid toy soldiers produced with a brass mould could be more detailed and realistic in their pose and design. Although the traditional flat figure remained popular in Germany up until the 1930s, the solid figure dominated the international market and became the most widespread and influential type of toy soldier in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



Figure 3: Heyde Box no.199, *Infanterie Große OII*, painted to represent US 22nd Infantry Regiment in winter dress, c.1880. Stewart Historical Miniatures Collection, Frazier Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

Lead was the preferred material for both forms of castings due to its low melting point and lower cost compared to other malleable metals like gold or silver. Often the lead was alloyed with other metals such as tin or antimony which improved the figures durability, but also made them more brittle. German-made toy soldiers generally contained a high lead content so that figures could be bent into complex action poses (See Figure 3), while British figures, particular those that were hollow-cast, were more static due to higher levels of antimony. Although long-term exposure to lead is now understood to have serious health implications, this was not fully understood at the time and throughout this period it was felt to be perfectly safe for use in toys. Indeed, it was not until the 1970s that lead poisoning was conclusively proved to cause enduring deficits in intelligence, attention and language (Needleman 2004, 210). Paradoxically, the use of cast-lead toy soldiers as a teaching implement may in fact have harmed mental development rather than improved it.

Toy Soldiers Prior to the First World War:

The first set to be examined can be seen in Figure 3, which features a variation of Heyde Box no.199, produced sometime around 1880. Included in the set are twelve 0^{II} size, *feinste Ausführung* (finest execution) figures, each of which stand about 145mm (5.7in) tall and weigh nearly 75g (2.6oz). This was one of the most expensive sets of soldiers available in the Heyde catalogue and would have cost 120 German marks, a sum roughly equivalent to six contemporary British pounds sterling, or two months' wages for the average male worker (Heyde 1996, 17). Considering the cost of this set, as well as the condition in which it survives, it is possible that it is an example of the kinds of material that was produced for the adult collector market.

This set also demonstrates the growing importance of the USA for the sale of toy soldiers. Both Heyde and Britains contested the toy market in the USA and it would become one of the major battlegrounds in the rivalry between the two firms. This set evidences the efforts of Heyde, even as early as the 1880s, to court American interest in their product by featuring sets based on the US military. The subject of the set is



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16 *Figure 4: Britains Set no.24: 9th Lancers (Queen's Own), released in 1894. Author's*
17 *image, private collection.*
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19 the US 22nd Infantry Regiment, which had recently participated in the Great Sioux
20 War of 1876-7. Indeed, these figures were possibly intended to tap into the growing
21 international fascination with the 'Wild West' which in the late 19th century was being
22 popularised by dime novels that fictionalised encounters between the US military and
23 Native Americans.
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26 While the subject of the set in Figure 3 was based on contemporary conflict in North
27 America, the design of the figures may show the influence of past conflict. Germany's
28 surprisingly swift defeat of France in Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1 encouraged
29 many contemporary armies to emulate Prussian military styles. In the case of the US
30 Military, this took the form of the adoption of the spiked Pith Helmet which was
31 visually similar to the German *Pickelhaube*. This allowed German manufacturers like
32 Heyde to re-use pre-existing moulds of German uniforms to represent soldiers from
33 other countries like the USA. Indeed, Heyde's catalogue included the boast that the
34 company would produce figures 'in the uniforms of whatever military organized
35 nation of the world' (as quoted in Kurtz and Ehrlich 1987, 30). The reality of this
36 claim, and the influence of the Franco-Prussian War, can be clearly seen in Figure 3,
37 where a mould of a German infantryman has simply been painted in the colours and
38 uniform of an American infantryman in order to appeal to the US market.
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44 The second set under discussion can be seen in Figure 4, which is an example of one
45 of the early sets produced by William Britains in the 1890s. Britains' Set no.24
46 features five horsemen of the British 9th Lancers produced using the hollow-cast
47 technique. This was an improvement on the casting process which involved inverting
48 the brass mould a few seconds after pouring in the molten lead. This allowed the
49 excess metal in the core to drain off, creating a hollow figure, which was lighter and
50 therefore cheaper to produce (Wallis 2017, 13-15). In fact, the set in Figure 4 could be
51 sold for just 15% of the price of similar sized Heyde set (Britains 1896 Catalogue
52 reproduced in Wallis 2017, 28-31; Heyde 1996, 23). The effect of this dramatic
53 decrease in cost was to make toy soldiers much more affordable and, therefore,
54 available to a larger proportion of society. Indeed, it could be suggested that the toy
55 soldier craze in the UK was actually brought about by the development of cheap
56 hollow-cast figures rather than by imports from Germany.
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1 At the time the set in Figure 4 was released in 1894, Anglo-German relations were in
2 decline as German industrial expansion overtook that of the UK. The set and others
3 like it became embroiled in the economic conflict between the British and German
4 empires. It was sold in boxes marked “best quality *English* make” (Opie 2016, xv)
5 and was described by newspapers as “far superior to the German stuff” (Dundee
6 Courier, December 12, 1914, 6). The market success of Britains in the 1890s was
7 seized upon as an example of British superiority over German industry and there were
8 even claims that the hollow-cast technique had been invented by Britains, despite the
9 fact that it had long been used for low-grade figures in Germany (Wallis 2001, 8).
10 Britains took advantage of this wave of anti-German feeling, contrasting their product
11 with that of German manufacturers who often made minor errors of accuracy such as
12 painting ‘lifeguards on brown horses’ (London Evening Times, December 22, 1905,
13 3). The set in Figure 4 should therefore be understood in the context of the
14 renegotiation of British identity in opposition to Germany that took place at the turn
15 of the 20th century.
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19 The set in Figure 4 also engaged with British identity through themes of imperialism
20 and colonial conflict. The same mould used for this set was later repainted to
21 represent the 21st Lancers who were marketed as ‘the Heroes of Omdurman’ (Opie
22 1985, 14). This referenced the British military victory over the Mahdists at the Battle
23 of Omdurman in 1898 and the colonial conquest of the Sudan. However, it should be
24 noted that these figures were painted in their dress uniform and not the kakhi that they
25 would have actually worn in battle. Indeed, the poses of these figures are distinctly
26 ceremonial; the officer’s ‘turned in the saddle’ pose was even copied from a
27 contemporary print published in the *Army and Navy Gazette* (March 2, 1889). As
28 such, the display of this set does not evoke scenes of combat, but is instead
29 reminiscent of parades, processions and other displays of British imperial power.
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33 From the 1890s onwards, Britains and Heyde would be in direct competition, their
34 economic rivalry reflecting the wider Anglo-German conflict. This is perhaps most
35 noticeable in their efforts to produce sets that responded to current military
36 developments. Both companies released competing set for the 1898 Spanish American
37 War, and the 1905 Russo-Japanese War (Opie 2016, 56; Grein 2003, 89). They even
38 produced sets to be sold directly in their competitor’s home market, such as Britains’
39 special figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Heyde’s set for the Delhi Durbar of King
40 George V (Opie 1993, 20; Roer 1993, 77). However, the rivalry between the two
41 companies was perhaps at its most intense during Germany’s support of the South
42 African states against the UK during the Second Boer War of 1899-1902. This
43 conflict brought about the creation of the immensely popular Heyde Box no.1073
44 *Transvaalschlacht* which featured two vignettes of red-coated British soldiers being
45 shot down by victorious Boer *Kommandos* (Grien, 2003, 91). In this latter example,
46 the political rivalry between Germany and the UK directly influenced the design of a
47 specific set which encouraged support for the Boers against the British.
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Figure 5: Britains Set no.160: Our Territorial Army Infantry (Service Dress) Version 3, released 1916. Author's image, private collection.

The production of toy soldier sets that depicted real life events has been described by Kenneth Brown (n.d.) as 'sinister' and Patrick Reagan (1994, 51) has noted that the creation of these artefacts were 'part of the process of the militarisation of society'. Graham Dawson (1994, 239) however, pointed out that the popularity of these objects was often dictated by their 'immediate discursive context'. By this it is meant that increased public interest in toy soldiers was often connected directly to contemporary military activity. In 1900 the *Dover Express and East Kent News* reported that the ongoing '[Boer] war in South Africa... created a boom in toy soldiers' (June 29, 1900, 7). This phenomenon was repeated upon the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 when the unprecedented rise in toy soldier sales meant that many stores simply couldn't 'cope with the demand' (Dundee Courier, December 12, 1914, 6). This indicates that the toy soldier industry did not just reflect current conflict, but was actively driven by it.

The way in which toy soldiers were constantly adapted to current events is perhaps well demonstrated by the set in Figure 5. Based on khaki uniformed figures produced for the Second Boer War, this set was updated in 1909 to depict the newly-formed British Territorial Force. While the set remained in production from 1909 until 1941, its design did not remain static (Opie 1993, 129). For example, the soldiers seen in Figure 5 belong to the third version of the set, released in 1916. This version was based on an entirely new mould which took account of the replacement of the old Slade Wallace equipment belt with the updated 1908 Pattern Webbing that was being worn by soldiers in the trenches.

The release of new sets which took account of changes to military organisation and equipment affected the way in which they were interacted with. David Hamlin (2007, 39) noted that toy soldiers were seen as "excellent tutors on current events" and the set in Figure 5 is an example of the types of material which were thought to be useful as a tool for educating the public on the changes that were taking place in the military. This activity was by no means limited to Britain. In the 1930s Heyde sold sets in the USA under the slogan "splendidly built soldiers and equipment teach tactics"



Figure 6: Heyde Box no.1074, *Sturm der Preußen auf Probstheida*, pre-1915. Lydia and Paul Bayer Collection, Spielzeugmuseum der Stadt, Nuremberg, Germany.

(Sommers 2000, 29). This perhaps feeds into the use of toy soldiers for *Kriegspiel* or wargaming which, although it developed into a popular hobby, had its origins in military training.

The large numbers of soldiers and accessories required to create a diorama or to facilitate a wargame could often take the form of *Schlachten* sets or ‘battle boxes’. Heyde, in particular, was well known for producing boxes that focused on historic German victories. One example can be seen in Figure 6, which shows Heyde Box no.1074. This set was designed to re-enact the Prussian assault on the village of Probstheida during the 1813 Battle of Leipzig (Heyde 1995, 62). The set was probably based on Ernst Straßberger’s 1866 painting of the battle, even including an accurate model of Probstheida church which featured prominently in the painting. Sets like this reinforced German identity as the foremost military power in Europe and this idea was not only absorbed by the German public, but was also disseminated to other nations through the export market.

However, sets like Figure 6 were not solely understood as glorifying past victories, they were also seen as a way of reversing defeats that were perceived as undeserved. Wargaming provided the opportunity to replay historical battles and act out revision fantasies. Heyde Box no.1051 for example, which featured the 1870 Battle of Wörth, was popular in France despite the fact that the battle resulted in a French defeat (Roer 1993, 29). The set included a number of cavalry figures in order to represent the famous charge of the French Cuirassiers that took place during the battle. The popularity of the sets which pitted French and German armies against each other can be understood as part of the legacy of the Franco-Prussian War and the revanchist feelings it generated in the France during this period. A similar phenomenon would develop in Germany during the 1920s focused on re-fighting the First World War.

However, wargames played with sets like that in Figure 6 were not only impacted by the legacy of past wars, but also by contemporary political and nationalistic conflict. The most common method of wargaming with toy soldiers was to line up figures and



Figure 7: A set of Flat 'Hochlander Sturm' figures produced by Heinrichsen c.1916. Author's image, private collection.

shoot them down with model artillery pieces that fired lead or wooden projectiles. Both Britain and Germany had their favored artillery accessories for this purpose. Britains' *Great War Game* (1907) and H.G. Wells' *Little Wars* (1913) advocated the use of a model based on the 4.7-inch naval gun which was made famous by the British Army during the Second Boer War. At the same time, Heyde produced *Kanonen*, which were modelled on the iconic German Krupp Gun (Heyde, 1995, 35).

Toy Soldiers of the First World War:

Open war between the British and German empires had a direct impact on the toy soldier industry as it subsumed the commercial rivalry between Britains and Heyde. It has been remarked that the first casualty of the War was the German export market which was cut off from its customers in the UK and USA by the naval blockade instituted by the British Royal Navy (Roer 1993, 21). The onset of total war meant that the industry was not only affected by the conflict but became an active participant in it. Heyde for example, received subsidies from the German government to produce propaganda figures for local consumption (Jorgensen 2017, 30). However, the German domestic market was still dominated by flat toy soldiers, leading John Garratt (1965, 63) to label Heyde as "a prophet without honour in his own country". Consequently, the next set to be examined will be drawn from the premier manufacturer of Flats: Ernst Heinrichsen of Nuremberg.

Figure 7 shows 34 flat figures in various action poses, grouped together to depict a scene of British highland infantry crossing No-Man's Land. This set was released sometime during or after 1916 and is an example of over a thousand different sets produced by Heinrichsen during the First World War alone (Sulzer and Macia 1989, 75; Heinrichsen 1997). This set demonstrates clearly some of the key differences between German and British toy soldier production. Firstly, the set depicts enemy soldiers, which was an uncommon practice in the UK. Indeed, Britains did not produce any German figures for the British domestic market between 1914 and 1918. It can also be observed that the dynamism of the soldiers seen in Figure 7 stands in contrast to the stiff ceremonial poses of the sets in Figures 4 and 5. As previously

1 noted, action poses, which represented actual combat, were common in German sets
2 which were often more realistic in their portrayals of soldiers who “do more than
3 march... they bivouac with mugs of coffee... play cards... study maps... fall
4 wounded and lie dead” (Johnson and Potter 1982, 32).
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6 It is perhaps these last two actions which are most striking in Figure 7. Included in the
7 set are four individuals stumbling and reeling from wounds, while another lies
8 conspicuously dead on the ground. This representation of wounded and dead soldiers
9 was unprecedented in the UK. In fact, during the entire period between 1880 and
10 1945, Britains never cast a figure of a dead soldier and only produced three moulds
11 for a wounded figure on a stretcher (Opie 2016, 56-7). The different approaches to
12 realism in toy soldier production either engendered, or was the result of, very different
13 responses to conflict in British and German society. In 1915, when Britains released
14 an accessory known as the ‘exploding trench’, it was rapidly withdrawn due to public
15 outcry (Wallis 2017, 256-7). This incident has received much attention in the
16 scholarship, where the exploding trench accessory has been described as crossing ‘an
17 invisible line’ (Duffet 2016, 239) with the depiction of combat and death as
18 something the ‘public did not quite have the stomach for’ (Kennedy 2014, 69).
19 However, this does not seem to correspond to the situation in Germany, where the set
20 in Figure 7 was part of a long tradition of more explicit depictions of combat. It is
21 therefore unclear how universal this ‘invisible line’ was and it may be that the way in
22 which toy soldiers represented combat had a tangible an impact on contemporary
23 reactions to conflict.
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29 As the First World War progressed, both demand for, and supply of, toy soldiers
30 decreased. The *Liverpool Daily Post & Mercury* noted that there was a ‘famine in
31 toys’ for the Christmas of 1917 (December 19, 1917) and toy soldiers were
32 particularly unpopular with bereaved families who did ‘not want, when watching
33 children at play, to be reminded of war’s tragedies (Sheffield Daily Independent,
34 December 19, 1918, 7). In 1917, Britains ceased production of toy soldiers entirely
35 and changed over to the production of lead shrapnel balls for munitions (Johnson and
36 Potter 1982, 33). One of the last pieces to be released by Britains in this year was the
37 infamously mislabelled 18-Inch Heavy Howitzer no.1, which probably related to the
38 BL 15-Inch Howitzer used by the British Royal Garrison Artillery. The switch to the
39 production of munitions resulted in the delay of the subsequent no.2 wheeled version
40 seen in Figure 8 (Opie 1993, 167). This model was designed for use in wargaming and
41 can be seen as a modernisation of the successful 4.7-inch naval gun accessory. The
42 howitzer came complete with three shells which could be loaded into the gun’s
43 breach, fired and the shell case subsequently ejected in a similar manner to the real-
44 life weapon. The design and concept of this model may have been inspired by the
45 1916 film *The Battle of the Somme*, as it was patented less than six months after the
46 film’s release (173). Howitzers like that seen in Figure 8 played a major part in the
47 film, with over 17% of its length devoted to the loading and firing of British artillery
48 (Reeves 1983, 468).
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54 The influence of the First Word War is also present in other aspects of this model’s
55 development. The howitzer was given a ‘fumed metal finish’, a process used to
56 protect lead shrapnel balls from oxidisation. It is believed that Britains appropriated
57 this technique from their munitions work and applied it to the production of their toys
58 (Opie 2016, 379). Furthermore, as seen in Figure 8, the howitzer was sold in boxes
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Figure 8: Britains 18-inch Heavy Howitzer, no.2 (on Tractor Wheels for Field Operations) released 1919. Author's image, private collection.

prominently marked with the 'King's Seal' of the National Scheme for Disabled Men, which was granted to companies who employed disabled ex-servicemen (Kowalsky 2007). Toy-making became closely associated with disabled veterans as a form of vocational rehabilitation in the post-war years (Duffet 2016, 242). Yet, it is rare for these toys to so explicitly depict the weapons that veterans had used, or had had used against them. Although outside the bounds of this article, the interaction between disabled veterans and the manufacture of war toys constitutes an interesting area of study that could be developed. Although it is uncertain how veterans responded to the howitzer in Figure 8, it nevertheless proved to be a very popular product and remained in production up until 1946 (Opie 1993, 184).

Toy Soldiers of the Interwar Period

An example of the material produced in the aftermath of the First World War can be seen in Figure 9, which features four typical Heyde soldiers dated to the 1920s. While the economic instability caused by the First World War allowed Britains to replace Heyde as the world's leading exporter of toy soldiers, the commercial rivalry between the two firms continued unabated. The US market remained a battlefield between the two companies and the soldiers in Figure 9 are drawn from boxes like no.1/178 *U.S. Tank Attack* which sought to engage with American audiences interested in the recent exploits of the American Expeditionary Force (Sommers 2000, 29 & 32). The moulds for these figures also garnered interest in Germany, where dissatisfaction with the country's recent defeat encouraged the purchase of American and British troops with which to refight the battles of the First World War. This can be seen in Box no.1/261 *German-American Raiding Party* which featured a set of trenches for the two sides to fight over.

However, the German industry never recovered its previous dominance of the international market. In fact, so massive were the losses of German manufacturers in the post-war period that it has been erroneously reported that the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 prohibited the country from producing toy soldiers at all (Roer 1993; Balkin 1997, 395-6). In reality, there was a general slump in demand for war toys across most of Europe in the 1920s as a result of rising anti-war sentiment in the aftermath of



Figure 9: Heyde American Infantry figures produced for New York department store F.A.O. Schwarz in the 1920s. Author's image, private collection.

the First World War (Dawson 1994, 236). In the UK, Britains responded to these pacifist feelings by investing heavily in new moulds based on civilian ranges such as the 'Home Farm Series' which was released in 1921 (Opie 2016, 110-1). Incongruously, these non-military figures, which were themselves a product of the First World War's legacy, were, in fact, cast from lead recycled from munitions produced as part of the war effort (Johnson and Potter 1982, 53).

However, the impact of negative responses to conflict on the production of toy soldiers dissipated in the 1930s with the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany, and the subsequent re-armament of the European powers. Toy soldier production in the 1930s began to focus on new weapons that would be used in the coming war. In 1934 Britains released its first armoured car, while German companies like Heyde and Elastolin produced *Panzerspähwagen* [armoured cars] and *Flugzeugabwehrkanonen* [anti-aircraft guns] (Polaine 1979). It is the latter weapon which is the focus of the soldiers and accessories shown in Figure 10, which combined a British 2-pounder anti-aircraft gun team with a searchlight and other equipment for sighting aircraft. The gun was designed to be used in wargames in a similar manner to the howitzer seen in Figure 8. Sets like this not only anticipated the weapons to be used in the coming war, but also facilitated wargames of this future conflict by replacing the traditional artillery piece with more modern weaponry.

Anti-aircraft guns became a popular subject for toy soldiers in the aftermath of the strategic bombing of civilian targets during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9. Indeed, Britains released their first anti-aircraft gun shortly after the infamous 1937 destruction of the city of Guernica by the German Condor Legion (Wallis 1993, 212). The bombing of Spanish cities had horrified international observers and brought about serious fears that any future war with Germany would see the same destruction visited on Allied cities. Sets like Figure 10 can therefore be seen as a response to these fears as they depicted a weapon that could be used against this new threat. By including accessories such as a spotting chair, height finder and predictor, this set had both an educational and a propaganda value. While the accessories informed the user about how anti-aircraft batteries functioned, the set as a whole demonstrated how strategic



Figure 10: Britains Anti-Aircraft Unit Display Set, featuring items released in 1939.
Author's image, private collection.

bombers might be shot down, thus defeating an enemy bombing raid. Sets like this could therefore be understood as a reaction to the general public's fear of future conflict stimulated by the events of current wars.

Toy Soldiers of the Second World War:

The outbreak of war between Britain and Germany in 1939 once again forced the toy soldier industry to contribute directly to the war-effort. The set displayed in Figure 11 represents one of the last products produced by Britains before they returned to the manufacture of munitions. Available only between 1940-1, these figures were destined for export to the USA which, as a result of the war, took on new importance as a method of acquiring foreign exchange for the war effort (Opie 2016, 156). However, the set in Figure 11 should also be understood as an example of British propaganda designed to engender support in a largely isolationist American populace and so encourage US intervention in the War. Unlike other sets exported to the USA, such as those shown in Figures 3 and 9, the soldiers in Figure 11 were painted to represent Scottish, rather than American, military units.

The set was sold as part of a series named after senior British war leaders, in this case "Churchill", which is marked on the side of the box (See insert of Figure 11). The focus on a Scottish regiment and the association with Churchill suggests that this set was intended to invoke thoughts of British troops in action against the Axis powers and perhaps even to recall Churchill's speech of June 1940, which ended with the hope that "the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old" (Churchill 2019). The fact that the set was only marketed for one year, until 1941, suggests that it ceased to be relevant once the US joined the conflict in December of that year.

The toy soldier industry did not emerge from the Second World War unscathed. The competition between Britains and Heyde was brought to a violent conclusion when the Heyde factory, along with the company's brass moulds, was destroyed in the Allied firebombing of Dresden between the 13th and 15th of February 1945 (Grein



Figure 11: Britains Set no.1913 the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), Insert: box-end marked "Churchill" series, 1940-1. Author's image, private collection.

2003, 15). The Allied defeat of Germany through military action allowed Britains to enjoy an Indian summer in the 1950s. However, the popularity of lead toy soldiers declined rapidly with the development of plastic as the medium of choice for children's toys. In 1966, Britains would discontinue the manufacture of hollow-cast sets altogether and the age of the cast-lead toy soldier finally ended with the prohibition of lead toys in 1967 (SI 1967 vol.II 3391).

Conclusion

At the heart of this volume is the discussion of what can be learned about war through the study of non-military artefacts. Few toys have been so closely connected with conflict as the toy soldier was in the period between 1880 and 1945. The influence of war has been demonstrated in the subject of sets which invariably depicted real-life military units. An overview of conflict in this period has been achieved through the exploration of sets that constantly adapted to military developments, including new wars, equipment and organisations. Even the threat of future hostilities has been seen in sets which represented the most up to date weaponry available. Furthermore, the legacy of conflicts such as the Franco-Prussian War or the First World War have been shown to have directly affected the way that these figures were made and engaged with by their consumers.

This close relationship between toy soldiers and conflict has allowed this article to elucidate some examples of how society responded to warfare in this period. On an immediate level, public support for war drove the sale of toy soldiers and conversely war-weariness decreased demand. The accurate representation of uniforms and equipment on these figures, coupled with their use in wargames, encouraged a belief that these objects held educational value and could be used to reinforce national identity through military pride, or even to assuage fears of strategic bombing. However, by contrasting German and British approaches to toy soldier production, this article has identified that these social reactions to conflict were not universal. Stylistic differences between British and German toy soldiers provoked different social responses, with the British public, accustomed to static, ceremonial figures,

1 remaining uncomfortable with the explicit depictions of combat which were common
2 in Germany.

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4 By contextualising the discussion of toy soldiers within the histories of the companies
5 that made them, this article has been able to show how toy soldier production was not
6 only driven by conflict, but also participated in it. The wider political rivalry between
7 the British and German empires influenced the design of sets and their use in periods
8 of peacetime. In wartime, manufacturers contributed to the war effort through the
9 production of propaganda figures and eventually munitions. The commercial war
10 between British and German toy soldier manufacturers, Britains and Heyde, was
11 consciously linked to the wider competition between the UK and Germany, beginning
12 in a period when relations began to decline and concluding in the destruction of
13 German industry during the Second World War. The narrative surrounding the toy
14 soldier in late 19th and early 20 centuries can therefore be understood as an example
15 of war through other stuff.
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