

Sets Britains Should Have Made

By William J. Miele

Ever fantasize about lead soldiers? I do it all the time! I especially enjoy thinking about sets that I wish Britains had produced; sets that would use existing figures not requiring new castings; just different configurations and combinations of existing figures and sets. The use of existing casting, painted differently, could have added greatly to displays and the enjoyment of collecting. For example, based on the Royal Marine Colour Party, only available at Hamleys in London, Britains could have easily produced colour parties of the Royal Marine Light Infantry and Bahamas Police. No new standards would have been necessary, just the use of the existing Queens Colours and Regimental Flag. Think of the display possibilities when combined with a band and detachment of soldiers marching at the slope. Combining a 7-person colour party with the 21 piece band of the Royal Marine Light Infantry and, say 3 sets of marching figures would make a magnificent 52-man display. Expensive but magnificent nonetheless. The same could have been done for the rarer Bahamas Police.

The creation of a Royal Navy Colour Party and band would have been fantastic. By the way, the only naval band ever produced by Britains was of the Royal Canadian Navy. It was a single 18 piece prototype in a plain red box done at the request of a Toronto collector. Combine with several sets of Bluejackets marching at slope and you have another fabulous display. Think of the grandeur when combined with a display of the Royal Air Force Colour Party, band and marching airmen and a similar group of Royal Marines. Colour parties add so much to any static display. It's a mystery why Britains didn't have more in their standard line. The following colour parties could have been produced from existing stock and would have been warmly received by children and collectors alike: Hussars, Line Infantry, Royal Fusiliers, Indian Army, U.S. Army, and Foreign Legion just to name a few. Having more colour parties would have stimulated more purchases so collectors could have built larger, more authentic mass displays. A mounted officer would have added even more to the aforementioned displays. How about a mounted officer leading a group of the Bahamas Police? A mounted officer followed by a colour party, band and a 24-piece detachment and you have something incredibly special.

Further, I wish Britains had produced a Royal Air Force display. Think of a large RAF box containing a monoplane, biplane, autogiro, pilots, fire fighters, and airmen marching at slope. A similar display set could have been done for the U.S. Army Air Corps. These sets would have required a standard Britains deep display box for the aircraft and then double stacked for the foot figures. I think it would have been a big seller although, again, rather expensive. Collectors today would go wild for a display set of this type.

Another possible display set using only existing production models would be a British or U. S. Army Supply Column consisting of Royal Engineer wagon, ambulance, pontoon section, gun team, mounted officer and



Royal Marine Light Infantry Colour Party



Bahamas Police Colour Party



Britains Naval Band commissioned by a Canadian Collector Post WWII



Examples of Standard Bearers that Britains could have made.

Sets Britains Should Have Made (Cont.)

dismounted troopers. A mechanized column could also have been developed consisting of staff car, armored car, bren gun carrier, and an underslung lorry. No detachment of troops would have been necessary for this set. Also, it would have been nice if Britains had made cargo boxes for its lorries. The boxes could have been similar to the boxes used for the Boer War Supply Column.

Another great set would have been an Army Encampment using a large display box filled with Hugar buildings, gun emplacements together with guns and troops to man same. A typical configuration might have included several small field emplacement, Nissen hut, guardhouse, barracks building, sand bags and troops. A 10" flagpole would have been a nice touch.

Also, Britains could have improved its line by adding more bands. The previously mentioned Royal Navy band would have been a very sexy addition. Also, a few more mounted bands would have been nice, i.e. Hussar and Lancer bands. Imagine the interest in a dismounted 11th Hussar band in No.1 dress with peaked hats, blue tunics and burgundy trousers. The only foreign bands done by Britains



Russian Red Army Band in Summer Dress



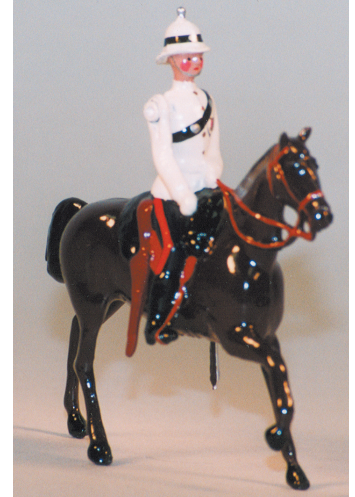
US Naval Band utilizing figures from Ron Ruddell of London Bridge and painted by Neil Rhodes



Eleventh Hussar Band in Number One Dress



Mounted Officers that Britains could have made



Bahamas Police Mounted Officer

were of U.S. forces. A Russian band using the figure from Set No. 2032 Red Army Infantry in Summer Dress Marching in Review had great potential. This marching figure had shoulder pins that are perfect for attaching arms with instruments. For authenticity, a Russian band would have had to be larger, say 32 pieces plus officer and drum major.

Most Britains sets, whether mounted or foot, contained officers. There was, however, a dearth of senior-level officers. The only mounted set having senior officers was #201 General Staff. In foot figures only sets #1908 Infantry Officers and #207 Officers of the Royal Navy had senior officers. Some senior officers appeared in display sets such as #73, #130 and #131. Using the same castings, standard officers could have been embellished with broader cuffs, epaulettes, collars, and sashes to represent senior or general officers. A set containing five senior officers, including a field marshal together with two aides, would have made a nice addition to Britains line. This set would have added greatly to mass displays and parades. The same is true of member of the Royal Family including the King and Royal Princes.

Britains had quite a range of gun teams that were creative and artistic masterpieces. Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery were very well represented. One gun team that I would like to have seen was a Boer War era 4.7" naval gun pulled by a team of 8 water buffalo using Britains figure No. 968. The only modification necessary would have been to use large 4.7-type wheels on the limber. A mounted officer in colonial dress plus several drivers with whips and seamen could have been included for additional realism. This would

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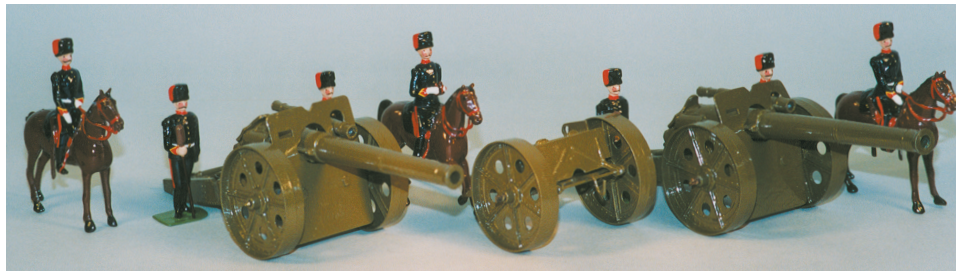
King George the Fifth-Center and Senior Bemedalled Officers

have been a unique combination of Britains military and zoo figures. The result would have been sensational.

Coincidentally, members of the British Model Soldier Society must have had similar feelings based on the number of conversions done during the 1930's and 1940's using Britains figures. These fellows were quite talented and occasionally one of their masterpieces surface today. Their conversions are considered quite desirable. When not embellished, they add considerable animation when used with Britains figures and displays.

would like to have a special custom set, consider contacting Neil Rhodes of Washington, D.C. Neil has a strong museum background and is a great painter. He has captured the Britains style and his work is exceptional. Also, he's very easy to deal with on special commission items. Whenever I come up with a new idea for a set never done by Britains, my first call is to Neil. As Britains become harder to find, more custom made sets will be made in the future. Since the creation of custom sets is so labor intensive, costs will surely go up. In spite of this, more people will want to enhance their collections with a few of these masterpieces. This could become collecting lead

a new trend in soldiers.



Royal Artillery with Mounted Officers accompanied by 4.7" Naval Gun



Boar War Era 4.7' Naval Gun with added limber pulled by 8 water buffalo adapting figures from Britains Set #28

All the photographs in this article except for the Eleventh Hussar Band are the creation of Neil Rhodes, Ron Ovark supplied the Eleventh Hussar Band

Editors Note

Britains did produce as a special order an Oxen Drawn Gun and Limber prior to World War II. The editor has seen an example of the Indian Ox with Yoke as listed in the Britains Factory Records assigned Mold #1374.