



German Heyde made West Point cadets to accompany the F.A.O. West Point barracks

# Yesterday's toy soldiers

Retired Brigadier **General Raymond E. Bell** takes a trip to a very special US toy soldier shop...

At a recent large auction, an F.A.O. Schwarz special wood model of a barracks representing one that might be found at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York went on the block. The model struck a special note with me as at the age of five years old my mother purchased the barracks which was accompanied by a formation of German made Heyde gray uniformed West Point cadets. The attendant cadets have long gone, but the barracks remains in my grandchildren's collection. Now accompanied by Britains West Point cadets in summer and winter uniforms and led by a converted Military Academy band they parade in eternal formation.

Just recently, however, Heyde cadets in the large set of figures which came with the barracks reappeared. A visit to the only shop in the United



Medieval knights by Krause in their original box

States devoted exclusively to old, or yesterday's toy soldiers, however, resulted in a great find – the proper figures to go with the barracks. At Neil Rhodes' The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, DC., a contingent of the gray clad lead Heyde cadets paraded on a shelf in his store awaiting an assignment to someone's collection. The West Point cadets were, to be sure, but only one group of the plethora of different

figures produced many years ago that were on the shelves ready for recruitment to a collector's toy soldier army.

From the moment you climb up the steps and enter Neil's shop tucked into the first floor of a classic Washington house behind the United States capitol, you know you are going to find yourself in a special wonder land. In out sized glass cabinets filled with figures are rows and rows of



The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C.'s new advertisement touting the shop's offerings

the genre of toy soldier I first saw and played with more than seventy-five years ago. Fortunately, for the adult, The Toy Soldier Shop allows you to recapture that burst of wonderment you experienced in your childhood when you opened your first box of metal soldiers. These are figures, however, for a collector, not toys for today's children to play with which come from the other side of the world.

If discovery of the Heyde cadets on the shelf in parade formation was a great find, a look at several old sets in prime condition being prepared for viewing and sale revealed an interesting and vastly different array of figures for sale. Neil specially favors the pre-World War II Heyde figures along with the compatible sized German Krause and Haffner soldiers of which he offers a wide selection of such figures for you to take home with you. So it was no surprise to find the →



Heyde boxed set of French Poilus (infantry), band, and Cuirassiers (heavy cavalry)





Haffner Bavarian infantry marching at the "goose step" best known executed by World War II German infantry on parade



British soldiers of the Napoleonic era by Haffner

→ cadets on one of the shelves among the classic glass cases.

For the WWI collector a boxed set of Heyde French poilus (infantry) and cuirassiers heavy cavalry on my visit was just ready to appear for recruitment. Going much further back in history was an exquisite set of Krause's Triumph of Germanicus in its original box was to be found ready for sale among other figures of the same time in history. Accompanying the Germanicus set was

an assortment of Krause's medieval knights also in their original box.

The antique figures for sale cited above, approximately forty eight millimeters high, are not alone in being subject to collector recruitment. There is, in fact, no special emphasis on a particular category or maker or even age of yesterday's toy soldiers and assorted complementary items, even non-military figures. Tucked away on one shelf, for example, were



Haffner figures of the American Revolutionary War

figurines of King Henry VIII of Great Britain which were sold at Madame Tussard's Museum made by Britains in London. They joined other eclectic historical figures to include German Field Marshal (and Weimar President) Paul von Hindenburg and some of his entourage in various scaled sizes. A truly unusual civilian figurine was the open-mouthed Chinese Buddha, a special metal vessel for offering smoking opium to a partaker of the drug. A purchaser of such a figure for its original purpose, however, appeared at best problematical.

Eschewing toys to play with, Neil is always on the

outlook for collections of unique figures to buy and his basement work area is often filled with figures from such collections in process of being prepared for sale. Often there are figures in need of cleaning, repairing, and sorting into sets. Many of the figures in need of repair end up being converted into special sets which a collector would like to have created to fit a special niche in his or her collection. Neil, as many serious collectors have found, is a master of such conversions as many collectors can attest.

To be sure, it's the traditional toy soldiers of yesteryear which hold a special fascina-

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Various figures of German Field Marshal Hindenburg

Left: The special Britains made British King Henry VIII figures sold by Madame Tussauds in London, England



The open mouthed Buddha, a repository for opium smokers



The boxed set of The Triumph of Germanicus by Krause



The F.A.O. Schwarz wooden built-to-order West Point barracks

tion for Neil. He is always on the outlook for old foreign made figures, especially those from Germany, so if you are a collector looking for toy soldiers which appeared many years ago, Neil is the go-to guy. When it came to replacing the cadets which went with the F.A.O. Schwarz West Point barracks, it was a joy to look no further than the Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, DC. I invite you to follow my lead for there is a very good chance that if you are looking for those unique figures of

yesterday that they might well be found on the shelves of Neil's shop.

The Toy Soldiers Shop of Washington, DC. is a true Mecca for the toy soldier collector on a visit to the capital city of the United States. Located off Pennsylvania Avenue in southeast Washington not far from the capitol and legislature buildings, the shop is close to a rail line of the Metro underground system. The store is open on Saturdays but a telephone call might reveal an alternate time to visit. **END**