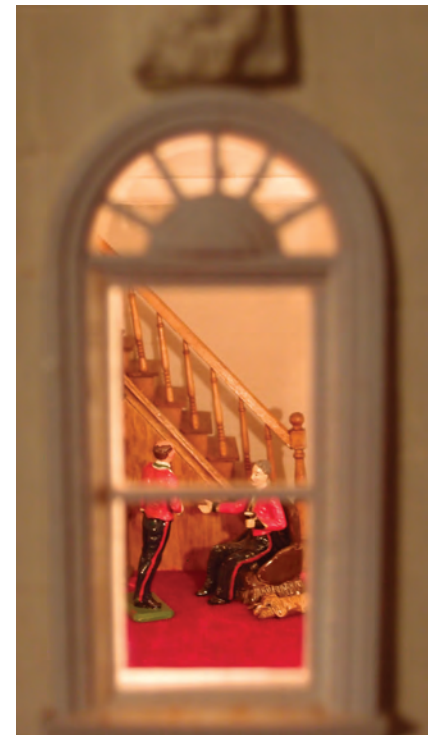




Facade of the miniature Army & Navy Club.



A detailed interior stairway serves as a backdrop for Club members.

Army & Navy Club Diorama

The Toy Soldier Museum's James H. Hillestad illuminates a gala Christmas party in 1905 London

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JAMES H. HILLESTAD

I felt inspired after reading John Lord Booth II's article "An Officer and a Gentleman," which appeared in TS&MF issue 225.

Casting about The Toy Soldier Museum's displays, I focused on a Christmastime diorama depicting an enchanted evening. I thought it would complement my good friend John's article.

THE CLUB

The Army & Navy Club is a venerable institution located in London's prestigious Mayfair district.

The Club was founded by Lt. Gen. Sir Edward Barnes in 1837, the year Queen Victoria acceded to the throne.



A chef prepares the meal.



Entrance to the Club.

Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, was its first president.

As its name indicates, the Club's members are from the armed services.

The dress code is designed to ensure that members are attired in a manner "consistent with the Club's traditions. The following attire is not acceptable: jeans, shorts, tank tops, and baseball caps!"

THE DIORAMA

My replica of the Club building is 30 inches wide by 24 inches deep (including a roadway) and 27 inches high. It was custom-made for me by the late, very talented G. Huntley-Williams of Windows of the World.



A Christmas wreath is brought to the club.



Party-goers sing Christmas carols and enjoy glasses of punch.



Ornaments are brought out as the Christmas tree is decorated.



Club members and their ladies arrive for the holiday festivities.



Club members refight the Russo-Japanese War's 1904 Battle of Port Arthur in the wargaming room.

The diorama contains four chandeliers, many floor lamps, two fireplaces, an interior staircase and colorful window boxes of holiday greenery. There are three floors showcasing five decorated rooms and a below-street level kitchen.

More than 80 figures populate the Christmas party display. A horse-drawn grocer's van and an elegant, four-wheeled open landau add to the atmosphere.

The painted metal 54-mm figures were produced by Patrick Willis (Sarum Soldiers, England), Graham Hilditch (Caberfeidh Miniatures of Scotland), and Americans Mike Ferguson and Dr. James Potterfield.

The diorama was awarded "Best Display 1997" by the Miniature Figure Collectors of America Show and Mart in Valley Forge, Pa.

LA BELLE EPOQUE

Army & Navy Club diorama's musicians, servants, furnishings and intricate construction details are reflective of the British Empire's glamorous Edwardian era. This atmospheric display reminds me of the charming exhibit of Queen Mary's dollhouse at Windsor Castle in England. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.



Officers enjoy playing billiards or whist and drinking whiskey.



Dinner is served to Club members and their guests.