

## Little Wars

*James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6, pays tribute to the prolific writer H.G. Wells and notes his fondness for W. Britains*

**O**ne hundred years ago, H(erbert) G(ordon) Wells published the classic *Little Wars*. Wells is best known for his scientific fantasies *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

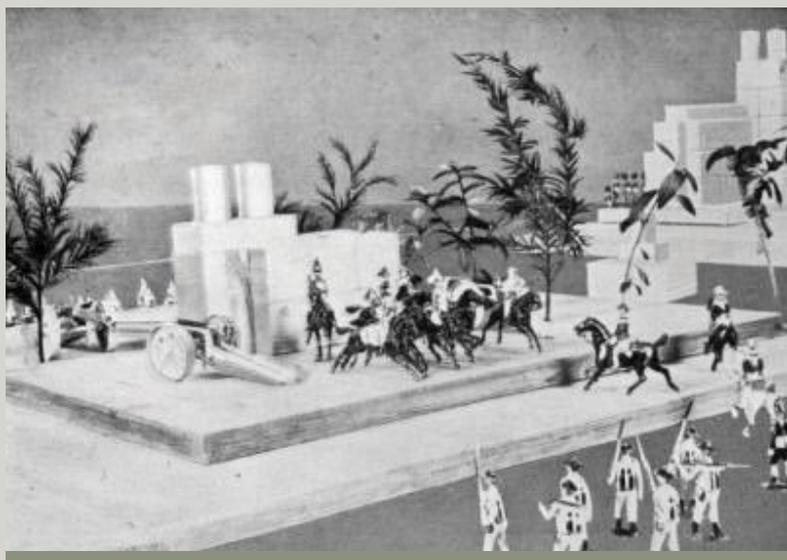
In January 1913, war was looming in Europe and *Little Wars* was both an expression of Wells' passion for toy soldiers and his fears about the coming slaughter. Those fears manifested themselves in *Little Wars*. In his own words, "You have only to play at *Little Wars* three or four times to realize just what a blundering thing Great War must be."

In *Little Wars* and its companion *Floor Games* (1911), Wells developed a set of rules for playing

**TOP**  
H.G. Wells playing  
*Little Wars*

**ABOVE**  
*Little Wars* by H.G.  
Wells

**RIGHT**  
The battlefield in  
*Little Wars*



with toy soldiers. Inspiration for *Little Wars* came from a friend who was visiting for lunch. The friend was drawn to five W. Britain toy soldiers aligned on a table top, along with a cannon. He drew a chair to the table, sat down, and proceeded to load the can-

non with a match stick. He then methodically aimed the cannon, released the spring in the breech, and hit one of the soldiers. As Wells put it, "He fired a shot that still echoes round the world."

The game that developed was based on the spring breech-

loader 4.7 inch naval gun made by W. Britain in 1902. It fired a wooden cylinder, about an inch long, and had a screw adjustment for elevation and depression. Wells regarded it as "an altogether elegant weapon."

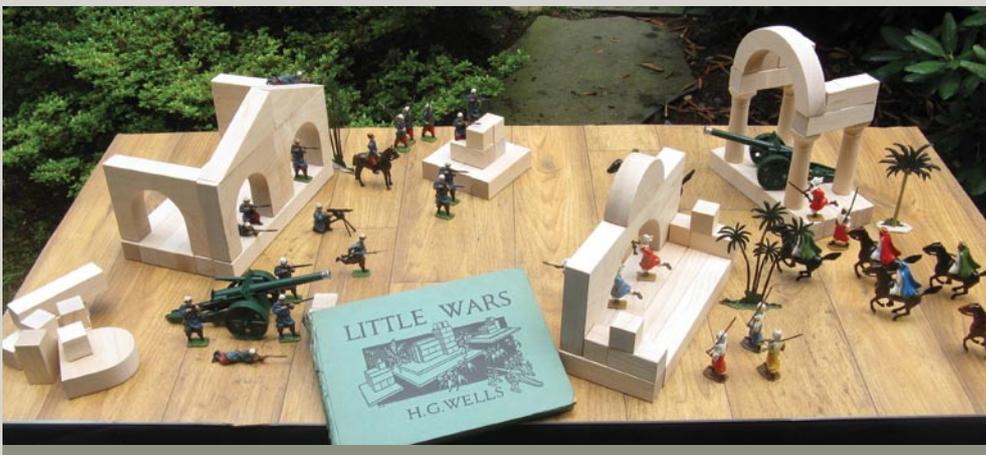
Initially the rules of movement stipulated that an infantry-man might be moved a foot, and cavalry-men two feet. Participants were to be provided with string cut to the various movement lengths to facilitate advancement or retreat of the miniature combatants. To be effective, an artillery piece

**BELOW**  
A simulation of Little Wars using W. Britain's French Foreign Legion, Arabs of the Desert and 4.7 inch naval guns, circa late 1950s.

### An Apocryphal Tale -- True or False?

Recently discovered archives reveal that Wells, Kaiser Wilhelm, and two other gentlemen played a game of Little Wars in 1913. The two "other gentlemen" were not identified by their full names, but were referred to as "General von M." (Moltke?) and "Lord K." (Kitchener?) Wilhelm refused to use the large W. Britain 4.7 inch naval guns in the Wells' toy collection for fear that his beloved miniature soldiers would be damaged by the wooden dowels used as projectiles.

The Kaiser won the game and credited his triumph to strategic movements and bold decisions. Wells was horrified. Instead of demonstrating to Wilhelm the futility of war, the game had given him false confidence in his ability as a military tactician. Wells was heard to say "What have I done? I wish I could invent a time machine, travel into the past, and take measures to avoid this entire affair!"



**LEFT**  
The Legion



**RIGHT**  
The Arabs

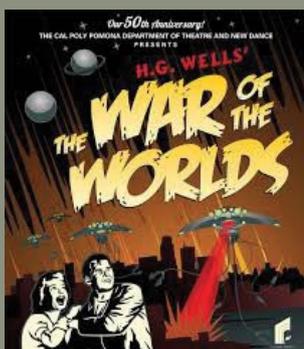
required that four men should be within six inches of a gun for it to be in action at all. Careful measurements from where the cannon-fired matchsticks fell would determine the number of casualties. A time clock insured that the tempo of the battle would not suffer from inordinate deliberations. The terrain of the battlefield was to be simple. Wooden blocks would be used to simulate forts, and a sprinkling of model trees would lend "realism."

Over a period of time, the rules were fine-tuned and expanded (Little Wars is 114 pages long) to include hand-to-hand fighting and even treatment of prisoners.

The writer, Colin Middleton Murry, recalled a war game on a childhood visit to Wells in the 1930s. "He rushed around frantically winding up clockwork trains, constructing bridges and fortifications, firing pencils out of toy cannons. It was all quite hysterical -- quite unlike any grown-up behavior I had ever known."

Happy anniversary, Mr. Wells. You are an inspiration to us all! 🖋️

### Did you know?



"The War of the Worlds" was broadcast as a Halloween radio drama on the Columbia Broadcasting network on October 30, 1938. The program was narrated by actor Orson Welles.

The first two-thirds of the 60-minute broadcast were presented as a series of simulated news bulletins, which suggested to many listeners that an alien invasion by Martians was actually in progress in New Jersey. Crowds that gathered at the landing site were reported to be incinerated by the space craft's "heat-rays."

Immediately following the broadcast and for days following, there was wide-spread panic among certain

listeners who had believed that the events described in the program were real. This, despite Welles' reminder at the end of the broadcast that the program was a Halloween concoction. As he put it, it was the equivalent "of dressing up in a sheet, jumping out of a bush, and saying Boo!"

**Jim Hillestad is a frequent contributor to The Standard and is proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227 or visit his website: [www.the-toy-soldier.com](http://www.the-toy-soldier.com)**