**The Little Wars of the World:
H.G. Wells and the Genesis of the Wargame**

I.   Introduction

In the winter of 1912-1913, a promotional illustration ran in the *London Illustrated News* for a new book. It depicts three grown men, all in three-piece suits, engaged in miniature warfare on a nursery-room floor. They tower over a Lilliputian world of miniature houses, cardboard barracks, mountains made of boards and bricks, and trees made of twigs. All men focus on the progression of tiny lead soldiers across the landscape of chalk rivers and paper bridges. One gentleman sits in a chair, hunched over a stopwatch in anticipation. The other kneels, craning forward to watch the third man as he prepares his move. The *London Illustrated News* informs the reader that the third man is "H.G. Wells, the English Novelist, Playing an Indoor War Game."[1] He sits and calmly measures the distance his troops may move with a length of string.[2] The newspaper provides a brief sketch of the rules of Mr. Wells's new game, later as the book *Little Wars*.

Little Wars was a companion piece to the children's book H.G. Wells published in 1911, *Floor Games*. *Little Wars* originally ran as a two-part series in *Windsor Magazine* in December 1912 and January 1913, and later became a slim volume of rules for a wargame with an appendix on the game of *kriegspiel*. Wells targeted the book to all ages, "for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty, and for that more intelligent sort of girl who likes boys' games and books."[3] *Floor Games* and *Little Wars* were vastly

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[1] S. Begg, illustration and caption for *The London Illustrated News* (exact date unknown) (*Making and Collecting Military Miniatures*, New York: Robert McBride Co, 1957), 68-69.
[2] Ibid.
[3] H.G. Wells, *Little Wars* [full reprint of the 1913 edition] (Surrey, U.K.: Arms and Armour Press, 1971), front page.

different from the concurrent literary work he pursued, which was for an adult audience

and contained inflammatory social, sexual, and political content. Further, *Little Wars*

seemed to deviate from Wells's staunch pacifism and socialist political views, as it

provided a systemized series of rules for waging war on the nursery floor, as well as a

description of the resulting satisfaction from these glorious imaginary battles.[4] Why did

H.G. Wells, a pacifist, create a game for children about war? None of the works I

surveyed offer any reasons as to why Wells wrote *Little Wars*, why such a book did not

come out earlier, and why there was such a long period between the publication of *Little

Wars* and the supposed "takeoff" of the wargaming industry in 1953.[5] The scant

historiography of wargames only mentions H.G. Wells as the father of the genre before

moving on to detailed descriptions of subsequent games and their creators.[6] Biographies

of Wells do not mention the publication of either *Floor Games* or *Little Wars* at all. Wells

only dedicates a few paragraphs to his thoughts on war and one sentence to the creation

of *Little Wars* in his *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934). Although these works do not

provide answers, I think that part of the answer can be uncovered in the context

surrounding *Little Wars* and its publication. This paper will attempt, after a brief

summary of the book, to situate the work within the development of strategy games in the

military sector up to the turn of the century, within the social and technological context

that created the inspiration and audience for the book in Victorian and Edwardian Britain,

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[4] H.G. Wells was a well-known member of the Fabian society for several years. Lovat Dickson, *H.G. Wells, His Turbulent Life and Times* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), Chapters 7-9.
[5] Charles Grant situates the "infancy" of strategy gaming in 1964-1969, but other publications push it back to 1953, including *Wargame Design*. However, all of these works claim that H.G. Wells was the father of miniature wargaming. Charles Grant, *Wargame Tactics* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1979), 22.
[6] See Ed Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press), Garry D. Brewer and Martin Shubik, *The War Game* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), Stephen B. Patrick, et al., *Wargame Design* (New York: Simulations and Publications Inc, 1977)*,* Brigadier P. Young, *Charge!* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co, 1970)*,*and Grant, *Wargame Tactics.*

and lastly within H.G. Wells's career and life. Finally, while contextualization provides some clues as to why Wells published *Little Wars*, I am not sure that it would hold up as a methodological framework for exploring the history of wargames during and after World War I, and specifically why there is a gap in development of wargames from 1913 to the 1950s. I will end this paper with some suggestions for approaching these problems.

Before describing or contextualizing the book, it is important to address a distinction that bears upon both *Little Wars* and its analysis. This distinction is the difference between a civilian "wargame," which falls under the broader category of strategy game, and the military "war game." In the period up to World War I, the wargame and the war game are similar in the mechanics of play; both use miniatures, or other representations of military forces, to simulate military maneuvers on a board, sand table, or contour map.[7] However, the difference between the wargame and the war game is one of purpose. The motivation behind the civilian wargame is to entertain. In contrast, the purpose of the military war game is to train and predict real possible futures. Military war game creators attempt to mimic real-world situations as closely as possible. Therefore, the difference between the purpose of the military war game and the civilian wargame leads to differences in game play. As a civilian wargame does not need to create an accurate simulation of a real-world situation, the game designer can dispense with issues that have serious consequences for the military war game, such as issues of supply and transport. The word wargame became popular in the 1960s among hobbyists as a way to differentiate between the hobby and the military exercise. While the creation of

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[7] Up until World War I, the military and civilians used sand tables, contour maps, and game boards. As technology pushed forward, wargames and war games both took advantage of the possibilities that sophisticated computer simulation offered. The military "war game" can also describe games played using two teams of men on a simulated battlefield, but for the purposes of this paper, only games played on a tabletop, board, or map are under consideration.

the word wargame came after *Little Wars*, I will use it to designate civilian wargames, including *Little Wars*, for clarity.

Little Wars is unique among wargames for four reasons, apart from providing a framework upon which subsequent game designers would build. First, in contrast to the military war games of the nineteenth century, as well as the wargames that came after *Little Wars*, which had thick manuals of complex rules, H.G. Wells dedicates a mere 13 percent of his book to rules.[8] They can be summarized in a few short sentences. Infantry can move one foot, cavalry two, and artillery movement depends upon whether or not there are enough men surrounding it. The skill in aiming and firing small spring-loaded guns and cannon determine combat. When hand-to-hand combat does occur, a simple one-to-one ratio determines losses, with a slight modification if the number in each force is unequal.[9] The rules are elegant in their simplicity, and Wells offers some slight variations in overall game objectives at the end of the section.[10] There is no need to turn to large tables or calculation charts in determining the outcome of battle, common to both military war games and the complex wargames that followed Wells's work. However, the question then remains as to what Wells does with the remaining 75 pages. This brings up the second point. Wells's book is unique because it describes the game designer's process within the manual. Wargame strategists limit their manuals to rules and necessary diagrams, charts, and other relevant information needed to play the game. *Little Wars* provides a rare glimpse inside the process of creating a game and the challenges the

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[8] *Little Wars* is 111 pages long, of which only 15 deal with the rules of play.
[9] The superior force preserves as many additional men, and suffers as many fewer casualties, as its superiority. Thus, if eleven men face a force of nine, the larger force loses seven men and takes two as prisoner.
[10] Wells offers up a few different final objectives in playing the game, including "Fight to the Finish," "Blow to the Rear," and "Defensive Fight." Wells, *Little Wars*, 55-58.

designer faces. The first half of *Little Wars* takes the reader through the humble beginnings of a post-lunch destruction of four soldiers by a spring-loaded breech gun to the development of full-blown wargame with rules, guided by suggestions from a Captain M., newly returned from the "Great War in South Africa."[11] The suggestions that the captain makes brings Wells's game closer to the military war game, used by the British Army at the time, especially in regards to artillery movement and mêlée rules. This information is invaluable for understanding the origins of the game and the extent of its relationship to its military counterpart. The captain's suggestions do not change the game into a facsimile of the military war game, although they are informed by his military experience. Instead, the suggestions of the Captain increase the playability of the game, making it faster and closer in feeling to an actual battle. The relationship between *Little Wars* and actual military maneuvers brings us to the third point. The conclusion of *Little Wars* is exceptional among wargames and manuals. The end of the book concludes with "A Sort of Challenge."[12] Here, after descriptions of the way in which Wells projects himself into the role of a commander on the field, awash in the glory of nursery-floor battle, he tells the reader about the pacific conclusion to which *Little Wars* should lead. According to Wells, "you only have to play at Little Wars three or four times to realize just what a blundering thing Great War must be."[13] Moral concerns do not enter upon the field of imaginary battle in the civilian sector, and no manuals I have seen make any sort of moralizing gesture about war. While this morality might seem to justify why a pacifist would write a manual for wargames, it is sandwiched between the glory of wargaming and the appendix on *kriegspiel* that immediately follows. While Wells is quite clear about

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[11] Wells refers to the Boer War. Wells, *Little Wars*, 23.
[12] Wells, *Little Wars*, 96.
[13] Wells, *Little Wars*, 100.

his pacifist beliefs, the few pages on morality seem out of place and contradict both the

glorious descriptions of playing at war that come before and the appendix on *kriegspiel*

which follows the conclusion. The appendix provides a set of suggestions for adapting

the rules of *Little Wars* for the military, which grew out of correspondence with a Colonel

Sykes. Sykes, who followed Wells's articles in *Windsor Magazine* with great interest,

wrote to Wells. He praised the game as a "vivid and inspiring kriegspiel" and hoped that

Wells would develop it into a tool for the military, as their kriegspiel was "dull and

unimaginative."[14] Through correspondence with Sykes, Wells developed a series of

adaptations that would make *Little Wars* a useful military tool. This clearly articulated

link between the war game and the wargame is the final unique aspect of this book.

Games such as *Risk* do not offer suggestions as to how to adapt their rules in order to

convert the civilian game into a useful military exercise. *Risk* is quite clearly a game.

Little Wars is also a game designed for boys and girls of all ages, but Wells states that it

could also be a useful to the army. He dismisses the contradiction between his pacifist

leanings and his assistance to the military by claiming that he sees "no inconsistency in

deploring the practice while perfecting the method."[15] This may satisfy Wells, but it does

not answer the bigger question of why he, a pacifist, wrote the book at all. Part of the

answer lies in the context, to which we now turn.

II. A Brief History of *Kriegspiel*: War game to Wargame

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[14] Wells, *Little Wars*, 101.
[15] Wells, *Little Wars*, 101.

The history of the war game predates recorded history.[16] Archeologists found symbolic representations of soldiers and military equipment, as well as corresponding game boards, in Greece, Egypt, Persia, China, and India. The ancient Indians, Iraqis, Chinese, and Japanese played variants of chess games that had clear ties to military representation.[17] Games such as Go, chess, and checkers survive to this day as artifacts of these ancient war games. Chess was an established game on the European continent in the tenth century, although it is possible that it came over sooner spreading from India to Persia in the eighth or ninth century.[18] The earliest literary reference to chess is from the Swiss monastery of Einsiedeln. It is a 98-line poem, *Versus de schahis*, which describes the moves of the various pieces.[19] While chess simulated war in the design of the pieces and the objective, which was to capture the opponent's king, nobles primarily played the game for fun and amusement, rather than planning actual battle. However, as technology improved, it changed the way people fought and planned for war. Developments in battlefield technology and advances in cartography and mathematics led strategic thinkers to attempt to design simulations that commanders could use to plan for war. Some altered the game of chess in order to reflect battlefield situations. In 1664, Christopher Weickmann, from the German town of Ulm, invented what he called *Königsspiel*, or "The King's Game," which was a 31-piece development of chess. It featured pieces that represented various military roles, including the King, the Marshall, Colonels, and infantrymen. According to Weickmann, the game was "not designed to serve merely as a

[16] Brewer, *War Games*, 45, Patrick, "History of Wargaming" in *Wargame Design*, 2, Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox*, Chapter 1, and Andrew Wilson, *The Bomb and the Computer* (New York: Delacourt Press, 1968), Chapter 1

[17] H.J. R. Murray. *A History of Board Games Other than Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) Chapters 2-4.

[18] David Parlett, *The Oxford History of Board Games* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1999), 299.

[19] Parlett, *History of Board Games*, 299.

pastime but would furnish anyone who studied it properly as a compendium of the most

useful military and political principles."[20] Several other variations on Weickmann's

Königsspiel developed, each moving farther away from the black-and-white chessboard

and toward a more realistic simulation. In 1780, Dr. C.L. Helwig, the Master of Pages

under the Duke of Brunswick, expanded the idea of war chess considerably. Although his

game was light on tactics, it was a step toward a more sophisticated simulation of war.[21]

The board now had 1666 squares, each colored to represent a different terrain feature.[22]

Each opponent now defended a fortress, and was given 120 troops, including infantry,

cavalry, artillery, pontoons, and 200 entrenchment counters in order to capture his

opponent's fortress.[23] Further, pawns no longer represented single men. Instead, pawns

represented companies or regiments. Helwig designed the game to teach the sons of

noblemen under his tutelage strategy and tactics in preparation for eventual command. In

1798, George Viturinus, a military writer in Schleswig, adapted Helwig's game to

represent the border between France and Belgium. Viturinus expanded the board to 3600

squares, and added numerous military stores and devices which opponents had to keep

track of, including siege equipment, fortifications, bridges, and bread.[24] In order to play

the game, opponents had to plow through 60 pages of dense, complicated instructions,

rendering it unplayable and unpopular among generals. General von der Goltz,

commander of the Prussian Second Army during the Franco-Prussian War, described

Viturinus's game as "a bad product of the refined military education of the period, which

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[20] Quoted in Farrand Sayre. *Map Maneuvers and Tactical Rides* (Springfield: Springfield Printing and Binding Company, 1912), 6.
[21] The description of Helwig's game is taken from Francis McHugh, *Fundamentals of War Gaming*, (Newport, Rhode Island: U.S. Naval War College, 1966), 2-3.
[22] McHugh, *Fundamentals*, 2-3.
[23] McHugh, *Fundamentals*, 2-3.
[24] Each player had over 2,500 brigades and batteries, as well as cavalry and field artillery, wagon convoys, field bakeries, and other complications. McHugh, *Fundamentals*, 2-5.

as piled up so many difficulties that it was incapable of taking a step in advance."[25]

Although Helwig and Viturinus's games adapt the chessboard and its pieces to create a

more nuanced strategy game, the chess model proved too restrictive and abstract,

removed from the realities of battle. The army never adopted these games as tools for

training, and it would not be until the first two decades of the nineteenth century that a

truly innovative war game would develop.

In 1811, Baron von Reisswitz, the civilian war counselor (Herr Kriegs-und-

Domanenrath) to the Prussian court in Breslau, began the revolution in military war

gaming. He got rid of the grid system, and he employed a standardized scale of 1:2373

that he applied to all aspects of the game. Reisswitz demonstrated the game to the two

princes, Fredrich and William in 1812. The game was so impressive to the two boys that

they told their father, who requested a demonstration. A year later, Reisswitz presented

his game to King Friedrich Wilhelm III. Reisswitz brought a large apparatus designed for

game play and a series of porcelain figures that represented different military forces.[26]

The apparatus consisted of terrain pieces, which ranged from three to four square inches,

made in plaster. Each piece represented a different aspect of the terrain, such as swamps,

villages, roads, bridges, and mountains. These pieces were movable, which allowed

players to rearrange the geography of the battlefield to suit their needs.[27] An umpire

presented a "General Idea," or scenario, to the players that guided the play of the game.

The rules, which Reisswitz devised, instructed players on troop movement, but did not

provide instructions for combat. The game was designed for military men, and Reisswitz

therefore assumed a military knowledge of the players, who would decide the rules of

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[25] Quoted in Sayre, *Map Maneuvers*, 6.
[26] "Reisswitz der Ältere," *Militar Wochenblatt* 73 (Berlin: 1874).
[27] "Reisswitz der Ältere."

combat as they went along.[28] The king enthusiastically embraced the game, often keeping

his family up until the early hours of the morning engaged in Reisswitz's miniature

battles.[29] Although was popular with the king, the Prussian army never adopted the game

as a training device. The apparatus was cumbersome, and as a result, seemed destined to

the fate of its chess-like predecessors. However, Lieutenant George Heinrich Rudolph

Johann von Reisswitz, who was a first lieutenant in the Prussian Artillery and the son of

the Baron, revised his father's game in 1824 and introduced it to army.

      The changes that Lieutenant G.H.R.J. von Reisswitz instituted in 1824 made the

game both more playable and useful to the military. He replaced the sand table with

detailed contour maps based on topographical studies, and reduced the scale to 1:8000

(roughly eight inches to the mile). These maps were closer to the maps employed by the

Prussian military at the time, which increased its appeal. Lieutenant Reisswitz expanded

on his father's rules for troop movement, and included a codified a system of quantified

combat rules, allowing players to calculate the effects of engagement and eliminating the

need for lengthy discussion. When the two sides clashed, the umpire determined losses

by throwing dice and consulting an odds table. Dice allowed for the element of chance

that present in battle, as well as making the game play more efficient.[30] Reisswitz

published the rules for his game in 1824 under the title *Anleitung zur Darstelling*

militarische manover mit dem Apparat des Kriegsspiels, with supplementary rules

published in 1825 and 1828. Reisswitz succeeded in showing his game to General von

Muffling, who exclaimed, "This is not a game! This is training for war! I must

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[28] "Reisswitz der Ältere."
[29] Perla, *The Art of Wargaming*, 25, Wilson, *The Bomb and the Computer*, 4.
[30] Lieutenant G.H.R.J von Reisswitz, *Anleitung zur Darstelling militarische manover mit dem Apparat des Kriegsspiels* (1824).

recommend it to the whole army!"[31] In the 42nd issue of *Militar Wochenblatt*, General

von Muffling published a notice (*Anzeige*) supporting Reisswitz's game, offering to

increase the number of available copies and send them out to commanding officers, citing

the "continually instructive" nature of the game.[32] Although some senior officers were

less than enthusiastic about Reisswitz's game, arguing that it could distract junior officers

from their duties or give them puffed-up egos, some officers, including Helmuth von

Moltke, embraced the game as a tool for instruction and experimentation.[33] In 1828,

Moltke created a war games club and began to publish a war-gaming periodical entitled

Kriegspieler Verein. When he became Chief of the General Staff in 1858, he instituted a

series of reforms of the Prussian Army, including a widespread use of *kriegspiel* as a

form of training for officers.[34] Despite the growing popularity and use of war gaming in

Prussia, it did not spread to other countries until after the Franco-Prussian War.

       In 1870-1871, the Prussian Army impressed the military world with their defeat

of the French forces. Other countries, especially the United States and Britain,

investigated and adopted German-style staff procedures, organization, and training

methods.[35] Despite some earlier attempts to institute war gaming as a training tool in the

British army, it was not until the Duke of Cambridge issued an order in 1883 that war

gaming became a regular part of staff training, claiming that the war game was

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[31] General der Infanterie z.D. Dannhauer, "Das Reisswitzsche Kriegsspiel von seinem Beginn zum Tode des Erfinders 1827," *Militar Wochenblatt,* 56 (Berlin: 1874).
[32] General von Muffling, "Anzeige," *Militar Wochenblatt*, 42 (Berlin: 1824).
[33] Sayre, *Map Maneuvers*, 10.
[34] Patrick, "History," 4.
[35] The United States adopted the German-style helmet, replacing the traditional French-style kepi worn by the Union soldiers in the American Civil War as well. The war game for Americans was developed by William Livermore and later by Christopher Totten, who attempted to create a game for both beginning and intermediate students called *Strategos*. The rules for these games proved too difficult for easy military adoption. Brewer, *War Game*, 50.

instrumental in the Prussian victory of 1870.[36] The game used by the British army was

Aldershot, based on the regulations of 1872, produced by Captain E. Baring of the Royal

Artillery. Captain Baring's work relied on a translation of von Reisswitz's *Anleitung zum*

Kriegsspiel, produced by Captain W. von Tschishwitz.[37] From Tschishwitz's translation

until the games of the turn of the century, the general principles of the British war game

did not change.[38] The general game play, including the use of umpire, time limits, colors

(red and blue), scale, and dice were features common to all subsequent versions of the

game. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, the rules became simpler and the

computation tables gradually disappeared. The manual *Rules for the Conduct of the War*

Game on a Map, published in 1898 for military use, was a brief 13 pages of rules and

simple combat calculation tables.[39] The military knowledge and discretion of the umpire

increasingly decided the outcome of battle. The game became looser and proved

instrumental in Britain's entry into World War I.[40]

Even though the military captains and staff engaged in these war games, guided

by detailed sets of rules, there were no corresponding military strategy games available to

the civilian audience. The commercial games available to children who wanted to play at

war tended to be of the maze and bowling-game variety.[41] However, an article published

in *Scribner's* magazine in December 1898 titled "Stevenson at Play" indicates a growing

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[36] H. Spencer Wilkinson, *Essays on the War-Game* (Manchester, 1887), 16-17.

[37] Captain E. Baring, *Rules for the Conduct of the War Game* (Great Britain: 1872).

[38] *Charge!,* 4-5.

[39] *The Rules for the Conduct of the War Game on a Map* (Great Britain: 1898).

[40] In 1905, the British army played a game that simulated a German invasion of Belgium defended by a combination of Belgians and the British Expeditionary Force. Because of this simulation, the British realized that transportation of British Expeditionary Forces would be slow in the event of a German attack. Therefore, they began to improve the lines of communication and transport between Britain and Belgium, as well as conducting informal talks with France. Once war broke out in 1914, the British game of 1905 made British entry into the war more effective. Patrick, "History," 7.

[41] Joseph J. Schroeder, Jr., editor, *The Wonderful World of Toys, Games, and Dolls, 1860-1930* (Northfield, Illinois: Digest Books, 1971).

interest in wargaming in the civilian sector.[42] In this article, Lloyd Osbourne introduces a "mimic war correspondence" found "in an old notebook, soiled and dog-eared by much traveling, yellow and musty with the long years it had lain hid in an old Samoan chest."[43] Robert Louis Stevenson, author and friend of H.G. Wells, had produced this "mimic" war correspondence, projecting himself as a participant within the thicket of a week-long battle game waged across an attic floor. Although there is nothing about the actual rules of the game, Osbourne tells the reader that

> This game of tin soldiers, this "kriegspiel," involving rules innumerable, prolonged arithmetical calculations, constant measuring with foot-rules, and the throwing of dice, sprang from the humblest beginnings—a row of soldiers on either side and a deadly marble. From such a start it grew in size and complexity until it became mimic war indeed, modelled closely upon real conditions and actual warfare, requiring, on Mr. Stevenson's part, the use of text-books and long conversations with military invalids; on mine, all the pocket-money derived from my publishing ventures as well as a considerable part of my printing stock in trade.[44]

While Stevenson never provided a manual for these "rules innumerable," the description Osbourne gives matches closely with the war game played by officers and military staff. The use of calculations and dice are reminiscent of the charts and calculations made to determine the outcome of combat in von Reisswitz's game and the games used by the British at this time. Stevenson's consultation with textbooks (possibly *Rules for the Conduct of the War Game on a Map*, which would have been available to him) and military invalids, who might have had experience with war gaming exercises, influenced

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[42] Lloyd Osbourne and Robert Louis Stevenson, "Stevenson at Play With an Introduction by Lloyd Osbourne," *Scribner's Magazine* Vol. XXIV: 75 (December 1898).
[43] "Stevenson at Play," 709.
[44] "Stevenson at Play," 709.

the shape of his game. Instead of constructing terrain, Stevenson preferred to chalk a map outline onto the floor of the attic, similar to the topographical contour maps used by the military.[45] There are also two novel aspects of Stevenson's game as Osbourne described it. First, the opposing sides masked their troops, and intentions, with cards set up on stands. These cards, when flipped over, revealed information about the troops themselves, such as strength and number, and the way in which they were arranged, such as in a column or cluster.[46] The use of cards to mask troops was similar to Wells's later use of boxes to conceal troops. Since the cards and the boxes were of the same size, a entire detachment or single cavalryman could be concealed, giving the player a wide range of strategic options. Players moved these boxes across the battlefield, and scouts or cavalry videttes could expose the contents, similar to the mechanism Stevenson employed. Although it is evident from the article that other civilians at the turn of the century created *kriegsspiel*-like games, Stevenson never published the "vexatious" rules of his game. It is possible that the article provided some inspiration for Wells. Stevenson was his friend and both had a passion for boy-like games.[47] However, H.G. Wells states at the beginning of *Little Wars* that his game developed independently with the aid of a friend, "J.K.J."[48] According to Wells, the game started when his friend, J.K.J., shot at a series of soldiers arranged in a row after lunch. From this seed of inspiration, Wells later suggests that "if one set up a few obstacles on the floor, volumes of *British Encyclopedia* and so forth, to make a Country, and moved these soldiers and guns about, one could

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[45] "Stevenson at Play," 709.
[46] "Stevenson at Play," 710.
[47] H.G. Wells, *Floor Games,* (London: Frank Palmer, 1911), 9-24, "Stevenson at Play," 709.
[48] Wells, *Little Wars*, 9-14.

have rather a good game, a kind of *kriegspiel*."[49] From this comment it is clear that Wells

and his friend were both aware of the idea of *kriegspiel* as a game of war, and that the

creation of variable terrain would make the game both viable and fun. Whether or not

Wells came up with the idea entirely independent of Stevenson is debatable. However,

from the introduction of *Little Wars*, it is clear that Wells was aware of the idea of

kriegspiel and that he intended to create one. The use of a variable terrain is similar to the

game created by Reisswitz the Elder, and the rules governing the movement of troops

bear a simplified resemblance to the *Rules for the Conduct of the War Game on A Map.*

The troops Wells uses are read and blue, the colors of the soldiers used by the military,

although this may have had more to do with the soldiers available than a conscious

decision on Wells's part. While the rules of his game do not rely on dice, computation

tables, topographical maps, or complicated algorithms, *Little Wars* fits within the context

of the history of *kriegspiel* and grows out into the civilian sector from it. Thus, H.G.

Wells created the first *kriegspiel* for civilians, with clear, easy-to-follow rules, and the

wargaming hobby was born.

**III. The Willing Wargamers: The Social Context and the Technological Innovation
that Made *Little Wars* Possible**

    Little Wars grew out from Wells's earlier book, *Floor Games*, in which it is

possible to see the beginning, and influences, of *Little Wars*. In *Floor Games*, published

in 1911, Wells describes the games that he plays with his two sons, George and Frank,

whom he identifies by their initials, G.P.W. and F.R.W. While Wells was a pacifist, both

he and his sons grew up during a time of increasing militarism that had a profound effect

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[49] Wells, *Little Wars*, 13.

on boys. Schools and boys' organizations institutionalized this rising militarism, which

also permeated popular culture in the form of literature, boys' magazines, and toys. While

neither of H.G. Wells's sons were in the Boy Scouts, both went to public school, which

exposed them to the militaristic institution of the Officer Training Corps and games such

as rugby and cricket, which were thought to be good preparation for war. Wells explicitly

notes the influence that this sort of exposure had in G.P.W., whom he suspects will

"become an imperialist", based on the way in which he conducts his *Floor Games* as a

captain of a ship stuffed with soldiers and bristling with guns.[50] The ubiquity of the toy

soldier also influenced G.P.W.'s play, as soldiers dominated the British toy market in

1912. The boom in toy soldier manufacture grew out of and reinforced the rise of

militarism, and toy soldiers invaded Wells's *Floor Games*, to his pacifistic chagrin. In the

beginning of *Floor Games*, Wells praises the manufacture of British toy soldiers, but also

pleads with British toy makers to produce a series of civilians so that his *Floor Games*

would be less militaristic and have a more variegated population.[51] The only civilians

produced en masse by the toy manufacturer Britains are boy scouts, which disgusts

Wells. He says, "We have, of course, Boy Scouts. With such boxes of civilians we could

have much more fun that with the running, marching, swashbuckling soldiery that

pervades us. They drive us to reviews; and it is only emperors, kings, and very silly small

boys who can take an undying interest in uniforms and reviews."[52] This quote

demonstrates the pervasive militarism that seeped through all aspects of a small boy's

life, but which Wells would later turn into a game for "boys of all ages."

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[50] Wells, *Floor Games*, 35.
[51] Wells, *Floor Games,* 22.
[52] Wells, *Floor Games,* 22.

The rise in militarism, coupled with the jingoism of newspapers and public

opinion, provided both the foundation for *Little Wars* and a receptive market for the

book. While militarism marked the adult world of Edwardian Britain, as evidenced by the

strength of the Volunteer Force and the substantial memberships in militaristic leagues,

including the Naval League and the National Service League, it also had a profound

influence on the youth.[53] Edmond Warre, a graduate of Eton and the Eton Volunteer

Corps, planned the Officer Training Corps program for public schools. By the turn of the

century, approximately 80 percent of all public schools in Britain offered an O.T.C.

program as part of the curriculum.[54] His intention in starting the O.T.C. was to instill

admiration and support of the Empire in young men, as well as teach them military

virtues by tapping into the growing cult of games and sports in school.[55] Participation in

the O.T.C. was voluntary, although some schools required it in order to graduate.

According to S.P.B. Mais, a public school headmaster, "we [did] not need compulsory

measure to make our boys keen; compulsion would probably act as a deterrent. The corps

is as voluntary a society as ever—but everybody belongs to it, to his eternal honor."[56]

Although the "eternal honor" and joy of every boy in the O.T.C. is dubious, this quote

demonstrates that the O.T.C. was an important aspect of life in a boys' public school and

the entire student body participated. It was definitely a part of George Wells's life, as he

attended the Oundle School, where participation in the O.T.C. was a requirement. This

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[53] The Volunteer Force had eight percent of the male population enrolled in 1903, The Navy League had 100,000 members in 1914, and the National Service League had 200,000. These members came from all sectors of society, both ruling-class and working-class. Anne Summers, "Militarism in Britain Before the Great War" *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 2 No.1 (1976), 104-123.

[54] Mark Girouard, *Return To Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 176.

[55] Girouard, *Return*, 176.

[56] S.P.B. Mais, *A Public School in War-Time* (London: John Murray, 1916), 11. Mais was talking about participation in the O.T.C. both before and during WWI.

may have influenced his "imperialist" play that Wells mentioned in *Floor Games*. Despite its name, the mission of the O.T.C. was not to train officers, but rather provide basic training to all boys enrolled in public school. Boys learned basic strategy and tactics, performed drills, and played a variety of games intended to mimic battle situations. However, this sense of play was only a part of the O.T.C. training. The relationship between games and militarism was more clearly defined in the sports games played in the public schools and in boys' organizations, such as the Boy Scouts.

Thomas Arnold, head of the Rugby School from 1828 to 1842, believed that the goal of sports education was to produce a student with a "body of a Greek and the soul of a Christian knight…[embodying] a manliness that would reinvigorate the depleted national stock."[57] Arnold cited sportsmanlike conduct, adherence to rules, and noble performance on the playing field as aspects of games that would create a population of well-bred men in the mold of the medieval knight. Sports created a core of future soldiers ready to fight against the next potential Napoleonic threat.[58] Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington, famously said, "the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton," illustrating the clear link between the role of games in school and military performance. Games encouraged individual bravery and determination, taught leadership and fellowship, and fostered communication and comradeship within the student body. Sadly, the confluence of war and games had deadly consequences for boys that went to fight in World War I. Entire football teams would join the army together in the spirit of brotherhood and heroic masculinity taught at institutions such as the Rugby School.

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[57] Quoted in Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to War: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*. (New York: Knopf, 2003), 340.
[58] Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's School Days*, suggested that physical fitness was the best defense against Napoleon III.

Officers kicked soccer balls and blew hunting horns before charging into no-man's-land,

infused with a sense of war as the "great game."[59] Games and militarism fed into and off

each other as the lines between war and play became increasingly blurred.

The last major institution that had an effect on British boys with regard to

militarism was Sir Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts. Baden-Powell founded the Boy

Scout movement in 1906. By 1908, over 100,000 boys, or roughly 5 percent of the

eligible population was in a Boy Scout troop.[60] This number does not include enrollment

in copycat groups, such as the British Boy Scouts, began by Charles Masterman.

Militarism and patriotism dominated the scout movement. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-

Powell argued that "the surest way to keep peace is to prepare for war," and that proper

preparation and training would keep boys constantly vigilant in case of attack.[61] The

military training that boys received in the Scouts also made them good citizens, as "the

soldier is taught obedience and self-sacrifice, he is usually sober, clean, and active, made

the best of things as he found them, and was loyal to his officers."[62] These were the

values of the military, of the games played in school, and of the extra-curricular

institution of the Boy Scouts. All served to reinforce the rise of militarism and

demonstrate the pervasiveness of military themes. Scouts mimicked the military in their

dress and in earning merit badges and decorations like those of decorated servicemen.

Scouts played at soldiering, storming walls, going on reconnaissance missions, and

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[59] Braudy, 342.

[60] Russell Freedman, *Scouting for Boys* (New York: Holiday House, 1967) Chapter 14. The average is my calculation, based on the population numbers given in Brown, "Modelling for War," 240. He states that 32 percent of the population in Britain in the early 1900s was under 14, half of which was boys (6 million). Further, based on this estimation and assuming an even age distribution, approximately 2 million would be eligible to join the Boy Scouts, open for ages 11-14.

[61] Sir Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (London: 1908), first installment.

[62] Baden-Powell, *Scouting*, first installment.

executing tactical maneuvers against other groups of scouts.[63] There were other links between the Boy Scouts and the military as well which extended beyond the confines of the movement. In 1912, the "Sheppey Disaster" linked the Boy Scouts to the navy, the army, and popular patriotism.[64] Nine Scouts, killed in a boating accident, turned into a national symbol of duty and self-sacrifice. The government arranged a patriotic tribute to these scouts. Naval warships brought the flag-draped coffins of the nine boys to their military funerals, accompanied by the gun salute reserved for servicemen. This episode emphasizes the link between a popular movement, Scouting, and national military institutions, the Army and the Navy.[65] The transformation of the Scout into a national symbol of patriotism paralleled the growing militarism in British society. Scouting helped to form this image of itself, but the media perpetuated it, and public reception of the Sheppey Disaster indicated a willingness to accept and support the rise of militarism in civilian institutions and society. The widespread publicity of the Sheppey Disaster was the link between institutionalized militarism and the jingoism and nationalistic sentiment that colored newspaper articles, literature, and toy manufacture.

Jingoism dominated newspapers and popular culture throughout the nineteenth century and the years leading up to World War I in Britain. The newspaper and magazine articles, literature for the youth, postcards, posters, and toys all referenced the patriotism and militarism of the Victorian era, as well as furthering nationalistic fervor among the vast majority of Britons. The invention of the telegraph improved long-distance

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[63] A story in *Scouting in London*, a fictitious account of a troop culled from the experiences of other troops has the protagonist and other scouts planning and executing an attack on another group of boys that were disturbing their meetings. These young rapscallions, after being defeated by the troop, were asked to join as a show of good faith. *Scouting in London, 1906-1956*
[64] *Sons of the Empire,* 178.
[65] *Sons of the Empire,* 178.

communication, allowing for more up-to-date reporting about war efforts abroad.

Because of the development of photography and the rapid growth of the daily press, the

British public saw more images of heroic soldiers and read about the "grand adventures"

of troops in the Crimea and South Africa. Writers produced articles designed to stimulate

interest in and support for the wars, as well as bolster imperial pride and nationalistic

sentiment.[66] The tone of these articles was swaggering, filled with the pride of a well-

established imperial power at the height of dominance, confident in its military strength.

Stevenson mimicked this tone and reporting style in his "War Correspondence,"

published in 1898. Battle reporting also came into Wells's *Little Wars*, in a chapter called

"Battle of Hook's Farm," in which Wells projected himself as a grizzled and battle-

scarred general leading his troops to victory. Other articles implied the possible deadly

consequences of a German invasion. Writers called for an increase in manpower and

training for the military, in order that Britain's shores remain secure.[67] This brand of

jingoism was also present in popular literature for boys. Boys' magazines, such as

Scouting and *Boys' Own Paper*, carried stories about a possible German invasion and

filled the margins with illustrations of brave Scouts wielding firearms against this

Teutonic threat, defending Britain and her citizenry. This sort of idea seemed possible to

young men, as the successes in the Crimean and Boer War gave British citizens a false

sense of security. Both wars were short and required only a fraction of British manpower.

The fighting also occurred far from British shores. Even though the telegraph allowed for

quick reporting, the battles were intangible, existing in the imagination of the British

public and the pages of patriotic poems, newspapers, and postcards. Veterans confirmed

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[66] Ian Stewart and Susan L. Carruthers, editors, *War, Culture, and the Media* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson Univeristy Press: 1996), 37-39.
[67] *War, Culture, and the Media*, 39.

the images of the heroism and gallantry of the British soldier perpetuated by the popular

media. Winston Churchill published memoirs that reveled in his experiences of South

Africa.[68] He situated his entry into a military career and later success in an aspect of his

childhood that would resonate with men that grew up during the turn of the century, and

would connect his story to the growth of toy manufacturing and to H.G. Wells.

In the autobiography, *My Early Life*, Winston Churchill recalls that he would

count "the days and hours to the end of every term, when I should return home from this

hateful servitude [of school] and range my soldiers in line of battle on the nursery

floor."[69] Churchill devotes the beginning chapters of *My Early Life* to his love of these tin

soldiers, which he described in loving detail. More importantly, Churchill explicitly states

that these days spent ranging tin soldiers and fighting imaginary battles with his younger

brother, Jack, directly led to his military career. After passing his Army examinations, he

says, "I now embarked upon a military career. This orientation was entirely due to my

collection of soldiers," and that "the toy soldiers turned the current in my life."[70] While

other influences may have led Churchill towards a military career as well, he is very

specific about the link between his nursery-floor play and his eventual career as an officer

in the British Army during the Second Boer War, to the exclusion of other possible

influences. He explicitly mentions his desire to be an officer when his father comes to

inspect his miniature army:

> The day came when my father himself paid a formal visit
> of inspection. All the troops were arranged in the correct
> formation of attack. He spent twenty minutes studying the

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[68] Baden-Powell, *Playing the Game*, Mario Sica, ed. (London: Macmillan: 2007) Part I. Winston Churchill, *My Early Life* (London: 1930), 60-73.
[69] Churchill, *My Early Life*, 20.
[70] Churchill, *My Early Life*, 29-30.

> scene—which was really impressive—with a keen eye and
> captivating smile. At the end he asked me if I would like to
> go into the army. I thought it would be splendid to
> command an army, so I said "Yes" at once: and
> immediately I was taken at my word…Henceforward all
> my education was directed into passing into Sandhurst, and
> afterwards into the technical to the Headmaster.[71]

Churchill's love of command is evident in the careful preparation of his tin troops, as well as his stated desire to lead troops of his own. His arrangement also demonstrates a clear understanding of attack formation, and he includes details within the chapter about cavalry and infantry placement that indicate a familiarity with military strategy. His professed love of history might have influenced his toy soldier maneuvers, but he does not provide details about specific influences. He draws a short line between the tin soldier and his military career, demonstrating the profound influence that the rise of militarism, especially in relation to toys, had on an individual. H.G. Wells found this connection between tin soldiers and military careers repugnant. In his *Experiment in Autobiography*, he recalled his meeting with Churchill and the fact that they both played with soldiers as young boys. However, Wells believed that he grew out of this, as he "began to think about war as a responsible adult should," but Churchill did not. Since he, Churchill, maintained a fondness for his tin soldier reminiscence, he "remained puerile in his political outlook because of [the militaristic] persistence" of this early influence.[72] Wells's sentiments indicate that, while he found toy soldiers a fine amusement for young people, they are toys, not inspiration for later careers. These toys were an annoyance to Wells in *Floor Games*, but later the focus of *Little Wars*, and their development was important in regards to the rise of militarism and the publication of *Little Wars*.

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[71] Churchill, *My Early Life*, 29-30.
[72] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934).

Toy soldiers have a long history, with miniature representations of military forces

dating back to ancient Egypt. Toy production from the medieval period to the mid-

eighteenth century was fairly limited, as toys were made by hand, were very expensive,

and owned mainly by aristocratic children as a result. [73]However, in the late eighteenth

and early nineteenth century, the growth of the toy soldier industry grew considerably.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, scientists developed new processes for

combining tin with other metals to create alloys, making metal cheaper and thereby

widening the toy soldier market beyond its aristocratic confines. The price of lead

dropped in the 1860s, allowing toy manufacturers to produce slightly cheaper models as

well, meaning that more people had access to toys made out of tin and pewter.[74] The

growing numbers of professional armies and standardized uniforms gave audiences a

wider awareness of the military, as well as new inspiration for toy manufacturers, both of

which increased the popularity of model armies.[75] Continental Europe, and especially

Germany, dominated the toy soldier market. The initial models produced were flat, two

dimensional *Zinnfiguren,* made out of tin or pewter that won several prizes at

international exhibitions such as the Crystal Palace in 1851 and Paris Exhibition of

1868.[76] After the Franco-Prussian War, the German manufacturer Heyde began to

produce fully formed, three- dimensional figures molded out of solid metal.[77] This

production coincided with the more general interest in Prussian military planning,

organization, and strategy games outside of Germany, as well as the growing militarism

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[73] Bard, *Making and Collecting Military Miniatures*, Chapters 1-2, and Kenneth D. Brown, "Modelling for War? Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain" *Jounal of Social History* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter, 1990), and Kenneth D. Brown, "Models in History: A Micro-Study of Late Nineteenth-Century British Entrepreneurship" *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (November, 1989), 529.
[74] Brown, "Models," 532.
[75] Brown, "Models," 529-530.
[76] Bard, *Making and Collecting Military miniatures*, Brown, "Models," 530.
[77] Bard, *Making and Collecting Military Miniatures*.

in Britain. This interest, combined with the increase in real wages and leisure time in the

Victorian era made these model soldiers quite popular as a result. They marched

triumphantly into the British market, along with similar imports from the French

company Mignot.[78] Britain's domestic toy industry was quite small in comparison to the

rapidly expanding Continental industry.[79] Thus, Continental soldiers dominated the

British market. However, the imports from the continent tended to be prohibitively

expensive, as shipping for heavy lead figures and tax and tariffs drove prices up

considerably. The models produced of the British forces by the continental firms were

inaccurate, which led to a growing dissatisfaction among a population proud of its

military. This dissatisfaction, coupled with the patriotism that colored boys' literature,

there was an increasing demand for British-made soldiers that accurately represented

modern British forces. Although Churchill boasted proudly of his all-British-made force

in the 1870s, it would not be until the 1890s that a standardized, affordable soldier would

be readily available to the British public.[80]

        In 1893, during a tremendous rise in the domestic toy industry in Britain, a man

named William Britain started a revolution in the British toy soldier business when he

sculpted and cast the first hollow tin soldier in his home in northern London.[81] They were

a big hit when Fredrick Britain, William's brother, introduced them to toyshops around

London. From this humble family beginning, Britains's toy manufacturing rapidly grew,

opening a factory outside of northern London in 1894.[82] In 1895, the English press hailed

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[78] Brown, "Models," 530.
[79] In 1841, the domestic toy industry of Britain was around 2,000 toy manufacturers. Brown, "Models," 529.
[80] Churchill, *My Early Life*, 30.
[81] Brown, "Models," 530, Bard, *Making and Collecting Military Miniatures.*
[82] Brown, "Models," 530.

Britains' toy soldiers as a triumph of toy manufacture, undercutting German imports and

prices by at least 50 percent.[83] In 1907, William's son Alfred took over the business, and

by 1910, Britains was producing over 200,000 toy soldiers a week in at least 104

different styles.[84] Britains's success was due to several different factors. The hollow-cast

was easy to produce, and since it was not a solid piece of metal, it was cheaper to ship,

keeping prices down. The desire to make a well-made toy drove Britains's efforts, and as

a result, the toys were more articulated, had bright, long-lasting paint, and were of one

standard size (54 mm), designed to fit with the model I railroad.[85] The resulting product

was one of which the average English boy could be proud. According to H.G. Wells,

> Toy soldiers used to be flat, small creatures in my own
> boyhood, in comparison with the magnificent beings one
> can buy today. There has been an enormous improvement
> in our national physique in this respect. Now they stand
> nearly two inches high and look you broadly in the face,
> and they have moveable arms and alert intelligence of
> scientifically exercised men.[86]

This quote demonstrates not only the development in toy soldier manufacture over

Wells's life, but also speaks to the nationalistic pride that accompanied these small

figures of military might. Britains was responsible for the invention of the movable arm

on the toy soldier, and it is more than likely that Wells is describing their product. The

popular publication, *Boys' Own Paper*, ran a lengthy article in praise of the fine example

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[83] Brown, "Modelling for War," 239.
[84] "By 1902, over one hundred and four different lines had been produced, including the Imperial
Yeomanry, the Irish Guards, the Somerset Light Infantry, the Worcestershire Regiment, the Middlesex
Yeomanry, the South Australian Lancers and the West India Regiment, the latter a delightfully colorful
model." John G. Garratt, *Model Soldiers: a Collector's Guide* (London: Seeley Service, 1959), 73 and
Brown, "Modelling for War," 239.
[85] Brown, "Models," 534.
[86] Wells, *Floor Games*, 19.

of British force embodied in Britains's products.[87] Alfred Britain, picking up on the

jingoism and Germanophobia that dominated boys publications, informed potential

buyers that his soldiers were proudly made in Britain, and the paint on the soldiers would

not come off in a child's hot hands, unlike those made by "our Teuton friends."[88] The toy

soldiers manufactured by Britains' stood in stark contrast to the German offerings in

other ways as well, as the soldiers shipped from the continent were "often not only

inaccurate but also anatomically unattractive, frequently characterized by overlarge

bodies, short legs, and overlong arms," unlike the soldiers that Wells describes.[89]

Britains's appealed to the British audience in other ways as well. Production also kept

abreast of the current military engagements. "Whenever a conflict broke out between

1893 and 1914 the appropriate model figures appeared on the nursery floor almost as

soon as their real life counterparts took the field."[90] Britains made a series of City

Imperial Volunteers and Imperial Yeomanry to accompany the Boer War, along with

Boer soldiers. Because of Britains's standardized mold, adaptations of the soldiers were

quick and up-to-date fighting forces were quickly provided to the public. Britains also

produced a set of soldiers with a slim book entitled *War Games for Boy Scouts Played*

With Model Soldiers in 1910, although this book, in contrast to *Little Wars*, was a set of

suggestions more than a set of rules. It encouraged the Boy Scout to use the soldiers to

"try and realize what Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener felt when in command of all those

men in South Africa."[91] It is also interesting to note that the only civilians ever produced

by Britains were Boy Scouts, of which they created five sets. The combination of

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[87] *Boys' Own Paper,* 1911.
[88] *Toys and Fancy Goods Trader,*
[89] M.D. Griffith, "The toy armies of the world," *Pearson's Magazine* (1898), 642.
[90] Brown, "Models," 534.
[91] A.J. Holladay, *War Games for Boy Scouts Played With Model Soldiers* (London: 1910), 10.

contemporary soldier production, links to the Boy Scouts, and the patriotic tone adopted

in advertisements and endorsements of Britains's products point to a clear link between

the success of Britains and the rise of militarism. Combined with the institutionalized

forms of militarism in the schools, in games, in the Boy Scouts and in popular media, toy

soldiers were another educative influence that helped sustain militarism, and enthusiasm

for war, up until World War I. H.G. Wells, in *Floor Games*, complains about the ubiquity

of British-made toy soldiers as a result of this enthusiasm. In describing the worlds he

creates on the floor with his sons, he discusses the dearth of civilians. He says,

> We want civilians very badly. We found a box of German
> civilians once in a shop in Oxford Street near Marble
> Arch…[but civilians] do not seem to be made in England at
> all—will the toy manufacturers please note? I write now as
> if I were British Consul-General in Toyland, noting new
> opportunities for trade. Consequent upon this dearth, our
> little world suffers from an exaggerated curse of militarism,
> and even the grocer wears epaulettes.[92]

However, these decorated grocers would feature prominently in Wells's next book, *Little*

Wars. The militarism and the resulting toy soldier boom created the cultural world that

surrounded Wells and the soldiers for which he would develop a game. The cultural

milieu that surrounds Wells provides a further piece of the contextual puzzle that explains

why Wells wrote *Little Wars*, but not the entire picture. The social and technological

context provided the backdrop, the pieces for play, the inspiration, and an eager audience,

but Wells had some personal reasons why he wrote as well. We will now examine *Little*

Wars in the context of Wells's life and career.

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[92] Wells, *Floor Games,* 21.

III. Going to (Little) War: From Pacifist to Commander in the Nursery-Floor War

While the history of *kriegspiel* up to 1913 and the pervasive militarism of the

Victorian and Edwardian eras provide some clues as to why H.G. Wells wrote *Little*

Wars, the author also had some pressing financial considerations that led him to write the

book. At the time of the publication of *Floor Games*, in 1911, Wells was attempting to

publish *The New Machiavelli*, which was rejected twice by his regular publisher

Macmillan because of the highly sexual and political content it contained. In *The New*

Machiavelli, Wells made thinly veiled attacks on prominent members of society and the

government while advocating free love, all of which Macmillan found highly offensive

and potentially damaging to the firm.[93] This was the second book that Macmillan,

previously a staunch supporter of Wells, had rejected. In 1909, Macmillan refused to

publish *Ann Veronica* because of the uninhibited sexuality of the female characters in the

novel, which was subsequently published by another firm, and panned by the critics.[94]

His expensive affairs with multiple women, two of which produced children, also

aggravated his financial situation. During this time, Frank Palmer, a friend of Wells and a

publisher, suggested that Wells publish a book on floor games.[95] Wells referred to floor

games in *The New Machiavelli*, which Palmer had read in manuscript form. Dick

Remington, the protagonist of the novel, played "games upon the floor that must have

spread over several years…from seven to eleven or twelve."[96] Palmer asked to see what

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[93] Dickson, *H.G. Wells,* Chapter 12.
[94] Dickson, *H.G. Wells*, Chapters 12-14.
[95] "It was the description of the boy's floor games in the novel which led Mr Palmer to suggest a book on Floor Games to Mr Wells." Wells, *Floor Games*, List of Novels.
[96] Wells, *The New Machiavelli*, (London: John Lane, 1911), Chapter 2.

these "floor games" looked like, and so Wells presented himself to Palmer's offices with

a collection of twigs, branches, bricks, boards, and toy people. He proceeded to set up a

three-hour game on the floor of the office, and finally left with a contract in his pocket

after exhausting Palmer and his staff.[97] Palmer published *Floor Games* in 1911, and later

that year, John Lane, publisher of *Yellow Book*, a magazine of ill repute, picked up *The*

New Machiavelli.[98] However, due to the nature of *The New Machiavelli* and its publisher,

public libraries banned the book, and advertisers refused to run print ads for it.[99]

Consequently, *Floor Games* was more successful than *The New Machiavelli*. This

success, combined with continued financial problems, led Wells to publish *Little Wars*,

the seed for which existed at the end of *Floor Games*, in the chapter entitled "Funiculars,

Marble Towers, Castles and War Games, But Very Little of War Games." While the title

of this chapter seems to indicate Wells's pacifistic beliefs, he instead tells the reader that,

"of the war game, I must either write volumes or nothing. For the present, let it be

nothing. Some day, perhaps, I will write a great book about the war game and tell of

battles and campaigns and strategy and tactics. But this time I set out merely to tell of the

ordinary joys of playing with the floor, and to gird improvingly and usefully at

toymakers."[100] However, in the year following the success of *Floor Games*, and forced by

continuing problems in writing and publishing his next book, *Marriage*, Wells began to

publish a series of articles that would eventually become *Little Wars*.

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[97] *Model Soldiers,* 199.
[98] Dickson, *H.G. Wells*, Chapter 13.
[99] Dickson, *H.G. Wells*, Chapter 13.
[100] Wells, *Floor Games*, 71.

While *Little Wars* drew inspiration from Wells's experience with his sons, Wells

later discussed other potential sources in his *Experiment in Autobiography*. Writing in

1934, Wells told readers that

> I liked especially to dream that I was a great military
> dictator like Cromwell, a great republican like George
> Washington or like Napoleon in his earlier phases. I used to
> fight battles whenever I went for a walk alone. I used to
> walk about Bromley, a rather small undernourished boy,
> meanly clad and whistling detestably through his teeth.[101]

Bullies picked on Wells as child, and this sort of fantasy, given the climate of militarism

and pro-military sentiment, seems like a reasonable way in which he would deal with

feelings of insecurity and unhappiness. Wells would return to this desire to control forces

of military might later in his life, when he faced financial crisis and critical unpopularity.

While he detested the practice of war, his imaginative projection of himself into a

position of power may have been a form of escape and a way in which to deal with a

world he felt he could not control. Whether for purely economic reasons, or a

combination of emotional and financial crises, Wells produced *Little Wars* from the

inspiration his boys had given him at a time in which he needed to make money and

perceived that he was losing control of his career. These personal factors, coupled with

the world in which Wells wrote, led him to write the manual that would become the

template for subsequent wargames.

IV. Ending with a Sort of Challenge[102]

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[101] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), Vol. 1.
[102] Wells, *Little Wars*, 97.

Little Wars was the first wargame produced for civilians, but after its publication,

no one produced any wargames until 1953. In *Wargame Tactics*, Charles Grant situates

the "infancy" of wargaming ten to fifteen years before his book came out in 1974, placing

the birth of the wargame in the late fifties to early sixties.[103] Other books on the history of

strategy games and wargames mention Wells as the father of the wargaming hobby, but

then move forward to talk about the "true beginning" of wargaming with the publication

of the game *Tactics*.[104] Why is there such a lag between the "birth" of the wargame and

its "infancy"? In this section, I will offer a few suggestions for this lag, as well as other

areas of research that may shed light on this problem.

The aftermath of World War I led to a decline of popularity in militarism in all its

forms. Examples of the disgust with the popularity of militarism and the corresponding

rise in toy soldiers included Ernest Fredrich's book, *War Against War*, an illustrated book

that juxtaposed images of toy soldiers with images of pictures of soldiers that had been

killed and horribly mutilated in the war.[105] Fredrich's book was in reference to the toy

catalogs published by Britains, which showed images of soldiers next to pictures of their

real-life counterparts. World War I, and the resulting disgust for war, had a dramatic

effect on the toy soldier market. During 1914-1918, war munitions intervened upon the

production of model soldiers, and it was some time before toy manufacturers had access

to metal again. Sales of model soldiers fell off after the end of the war. During the

interwar period, sales of model soldiers remained well below pre-war levels. Companies

introduced more civilian models to the market, such as the Model Home Farm figures

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[103] Grant, *Wargame Tactics*, 22.
[104] Perla, *The Art of Wargaming, Wargame Design,* and Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox.*
[105] Ernest Friedrich, *War Against War!* [reprint of 1924 edition] (London: New Comet Press, 1987).

that enjoyed more success than their bellicose counterparts did.[106] Wells was probably

pleased, especially as had given up playing his wargame in 1916 out of disgust with the

horrors of World War I.[107] World War I had changed not just the context of Wells's

game, but the rules as well. Technological innovations rendered the cavalry, once a

devastating strategic aspect of both the military war game and Wells's wargame obsolete.

Massive changes in technology, including the invention of poison gas, the use of

airplanes, and the development of submarine warfare challenged the strategic

underpinnings of both the military war game and Wells's hobby wargame. Garry Brewer,

in *War Games,* comments on this change. "Before World War I, an infantryman and a

cavalry trooper were somewhat comparable as fighting elements; symmetrical

assumptions about opposing forces and their capabilities could be made. With the advent

of technological specialization and increasing differentiation among weapons and

systems for their deployment, simply counting men, horses, and cannon no longer

sufficed." Both the military war game at the turn of the century and Wells's wargame in

1913 assumed that all troops were equal. The number of men and horses determined the

outcome in mêlée engagements in both situations. However, the new developments in

technology meant that soldiers were no longer equal, as the cavalry trooper was useless

and the loss of infantrymen could not determined by a simple one-to-one ratio because to

increased firepower and other devastating developments. The context that created *Little*

Wars had changed dramatically, and the decline in popularity of wargames and toys,

coupled with the erosion of the outmoded strategy and tactics of Wells's wargame makes

a decline in game development logical.

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[106] *Model Soldiers*, 70.
[107] Wells, *Experiment,* Vol. 1.

However, some of the social context, as well as military interest, that produced *Little Wars* remained. This raises the question as to how far context works as an explanatory structure, and suggests other avenues of research. In the civilian sector, institutions such as the Boy Scouts still existed. While the founder, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, argued that it was a peaceful organization, the militaristic trappings, ideology, and training that dominated the pre-war style of scouting determined the post-war style as well. Toy manufacturers continued to develop new methods of production, increasing standardization and productivity at a rapid pace. More importantly, the increasing interest of the military in strategy and tactics, which partially led to the creation of the civilian wargame in the first place, dominated staff and war colleges in Britain, as well as other countries. The desire to prevent a war on the scale of the Great War, as well as questions about geo-political strategy and politics, dominated these concerns. This to led questions about whether a decisive war could be fought at sea or on land. Strategists designed massive simulations in order to determine which was more effective.[108] While the social context that created *Little Wars* lessened, it remained, and the military interest in strategy was much stronger than before the war. Perhaps context, which provided some answers as to why Wells wrote *Little Wars*, can do the same in explaining the gap between *Little Wars* and *Tactics*, but other areas of research might provide other answers as well.

I cannot provide an answer as to why there was a gap of 40 years between the first wargame and the next, but based on my research, there are some clues as to where to go from 1913. First, H.G. Wells talked extensively with captains both during the development of his game and after, as indicated in the appendix. The interaction between

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[108] The book *The Influence of Sea Power on History*, published in 1890 by the American geo-strategist Alfred T. Mahan, sparked this debate in war colleges across the globe.

the military and civilian sector was important in the development of *Little Wars* because

it led to a more accurate and playable game, as well as providing H.G. Wells with more

information and ideas. Thus, an examination between the extent of military and civilian

interaction in the 40-year period between *Little Wars* and *Tactics* could help explain the

lag. A lack of interaction, due to security issues or other considerations, might provide

some of the answer. Secondly, an investigation into the development of games and toys

might explain the lack of wargames. By looking into manufacturing catalogs, parallel

developments in other games, such as Monopoly or Life, and toy economics, a pattern

may emerge that would explain the popularity of some games or toys at the expense of

the wargame. When Wells produced *Little Wars*, the game-playing population did not

have many strategy-based games other than checkers and chess. Board games were

limited to variations on mazes and chutes-and-ladders themes. Perhaps other types of

strategy games, like Monopoly (based on economic strategy), replaced wargames in the

post-war period. The increased technology and changing nature of military strategy may

have made wargame development difficult or impossible, as the rules would have been

very complex and difficult for children to follow. Other strategy games may have been

easier to develop and more marketable for this reason. Thirdly, delving back into the

social context, a more detailed investigation into popular culture, including children's

literature, movies, and other media may explain the decline of wargames. Children's

interests might have provided game designers with new inspiration towards the

development of other games based on popular themes. Some of these topics, such as toy

economics and the interaction between civilian and military game designers, get little to

no attention in the historiography I surveyed. I hope that this paper will encourage further

exploration of these topics, as well as uncovering new avenues of inquiry that will lead to a fuller picture of the history of strategy games.

Little Wars was the product of a history of strategy games up until the turn of the century, a world dominated by militarism, jingoism, and patriotism, the toy soldier boom of the turn of the century, and the financial and personal problems of its author. This paper was an attempt to explore these contributing factors as reasons for why a self-described pacifist would write the first wargame for children. The historical, social, technological, and personal context of H.G. Wells's world goes part of the way in providing an answer, but it leaves other questions in its wake. The answer to these questions may lie in a panoply of places, some of which I briefly sketched above. I do not have all the answers, but I hope that this paper will serve as a beginning to an approach to the problem.