Collector extraordinaire James H. Hillestad kicks off this month’s special section by outlining the history of the Second Anglo-Boer War, which pitted a mighty empire against a nation of farmers from 1899-1902.

Boers came to South Africa’s Cape of Good Hope, a Dutch colony, in the latter half of the 1600s as religious refugees from Holland. They established farms with slave labor and lived in what they considered a land of milk and honey.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain feared a disruption in its sea routes to India and Australia, so it annexed the Cape Colony and proceeded to outlaw slavery.

The Boers moved out and north, founding the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Both actions were recognized and approved by the British government.

THREE PHASES OF WAR

What the British thought would be a short-lived, glorious conflict turned into a protracted war involving more than a half-million combatants.

The Boers made the strategic mistake of
Inasmuch as the British were fighting in a hostile territory during the Second Anglo-Boer War, it was felt that security for prisoners would be better managed if they were transported to remote, escape-proof facilities. As a result, 24,000 Boer men and children were interred on the islands of St. Helena, Bermuda and Ceylon, as well as in India. The youngest POW was 6 years old; the oldest 80.

To pass the time and to earn pocket money to supplement their diet or to buy tobacco, the POWs were allowed pocket knives with which to make curios and toys for sale in local shops to tourists. For materials, the Boers used bone, ivory and wood.

--James H. Hillestad

Boer prisoners of war

British soldiers guard Boers of all ages at a POW camp in Bermuda. Figures by Trophy and OZMade.

Kingcast set depicting the "Wolf Gun," a 4.5-inch howitzer made from a drainpipe used by the British during the defense of Mafeking.

Hand-carved napkin rings made by Boer prisoners. The one in the middle from St. Helena is of cow bone. The two wooden ones are marked Bermuda (left) and Ceylon. (Writer’s Collection)

Pipe hand-carved by a British prisoner, Sgt. F. Longshaw, 2nd Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment. Carved into the bowl are the battles in which he fought, his name and regiment. (Writer’s Collection)
The Second Anglo-Boer War was exactly like every other war in that it was unlike any other war. --W.E. Davies, British Rifle Brigade

More than 22,000 British troops, 25,000 Boers and 12,000 Africans lost their lives during the war. Wounds and disease accounted for an additional 100,000 casualties.

Some 20,000 more Boers died in the concentration camps -- mostly women and children.

The British employed 450,000 troops to subdue an army of farmers numbering at most 88,000.

Despite these horrific statistics, the Second Anglo-Boer War was called by military historian J.F.C. Fuller “The Last of the Gentlemen’s Wars” because of the compassion and chivalrous conduct shown by leaders on both sides. The war witnessed Christmas truces, armistices to retrieve wounded and a complete confidence that the wounded would be well-cared for by the other side.

After one battle, British Gen. Horatio Herbert Kitchener courteously returned to Boer commander Louis Botha his Bible and hymn book.

The Anglo-Boer War was considered to be the forerunner of modern warfare. Some of its historical “firsts” and groundbreaking techniques included:

- Trench warfare was initiated.
- Armored trains were used.
- Guerilla warfare was waged.
- Observation balloons and carrier pigeons were used for communications.
- Wireless transmission of messages was introduced.

The Hyposcope was a forerunner of the World War I trench periscope. It afforded a measure of protection to the British soldier as he remained out of sight of the Boers. (Writer’s Collection)
When soldiers went off to war, it was common for friends and relatives to send them gifts to supplement their meager rations. Most notably Queen Victoria sent tins of chocolates to all the British troops fighting in the Second Anglo-Boer War as a New Year’s gift in 1900.

It was a prodigious undertaking. There were 120,000 soldiers in South Africa in 1899, which called for 20 tons of the best vanilla chocolate.

To fulfill the order, three chocolate manufacturers were enlisted: Fry, Cadbury and Rowntree.

The three firms had a problem, however, because they were all owned by Quakers. The creed of the Society of Friends abhors war, so to participate in this effort would put them at odds with their beliefs. Nevertheless, they felt an obligation to the Queen.

Thus the candy makers declared that they would oblige the Crown, but would take no profit from their efforts. Also their company names would not appear on the tins, though their names were embossed on the chocolate bars -- a subtle marketing touch!

The tin was to be of a size and shape, with rounded edges, such that it would easily fit into a soldier’s knapsack.

The tins containing the chocolates were shipped in December 1899 and were enthusiastically received by the troops. The tins combined “trophy value” with an act of sentiment from a solicitous woman, their Queen.

At the sight of the tins, all the men who could do so stood at attention.

– James H. Hillestad

Queen Victoria chocolate tin with the original chocolates. (Writer’s Collection)
Blockhouses, barbed wire and concentration camps were added to the inventory of “defensive measures.”

The new illustrated press and cinematograph films brought the war home to the man on the street.

**TOY SOLDIERS**

The Second Anglo-Boer War was not a colorful conflict. The uniforms on both sides were drab and the landscape was relatively featureless. Nevertheless, it was a monumental war that has attracted the attention of a large number of modern era makers of painted metal toy soldiers. Among them have been W. Britain, All the Queen’s Men, Potsdammer Tin Soldiers, Drill Square, British Bulldog, W.C. Stanton, Sarum Soldiers, Military Pageant and Kingcast.

Some of the other makers of Boer War items through the years have included HM of Great Britain, Imperial Productions, Les Miniatures.

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**GOODBYE, DOLLY GRAY**

British infantry march off to war to the popular music hall song “Goodbye, Dolly Gray.” Figures by Trophy.

**Good-bye Dolly I must leave you, Though it breaks my heart to go, Something tells me I am needed, At the front to fight the foe. See the soldier boys are marching, And I can no longer stay, Hark! I hear the bugle calling, Good-bye Dolly Gray.**

--From “Good-Bye, Dolly Gray,” a popular tune during the Boer War.
opens a new door to displaying the transition from the 19th century to the 20th century in uniforms, tactics and weaponry. Many illustrious individuals who took part in the war have been modeled in miniature as well.

Collecting figures based on the Second Anglo-Boer War captures a uniquely exciting snapshot of history.

**EPILOGUE**

The Peace Treaty at Vereeniging signed May 31, 1902, formally ended the war.

The British were magnanimous in the terms, which included more than £16 million for reconstruction and resettlement. With the peace came the Coronation of British King Edward VII Aug. 9, 1902.

Boers held in overseas prison camps were required to take an oath of allegiance to the British Crown before they were allowed to return to South Africa. Of the 24,000 held captive, only 1,000 refused to take the oath and settled elsewhere after liberation.

At the conclusion of the war, it became clear to other European powers that it had taken the entire British regular army to deal with a comparatively small number of determined and mobile Boer irregulars. Germany in particular took note of the crack in Britain’s “invincibility,” which gave encouragement to those in power in Germany in 1914, the year World War I erupted.

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**SUGGESTED READING**

- Belfield, Eversley; “The Boer War.”
- Farwell, Byron; “The Great Boer War.”
- Kandyba-Foxcroft, Elisaveta; “Russia and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902.”
- Lee, Emanoel; “To the Bitter End.”
- Pretorius, Fransjoohan; “The Anglo Boer-War 1899-1902.”

**ABOUT THE WRITER**

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