

# THE SHOPPING CAPITAL



"THE TOY SOLDIER SHOP OF WASHINGTON, D.C. IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS."

**WASHINGTON D.C. IS ONE CITY YOU'D EXPECT TO FIND A TOY SOLDIER SHOP, YET ONE DIDN'T EXIST, BUT THANKS TO NEIL RHODES THAT'S NO LONGER THE CASE**

**O**ne would think that there would be a shop in or around Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, where one could purchase toy soldiers and other military memorabilia. At the beginning of May 2002, there was no such place, but that's all changing. As this was being written "The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C." was just

opening its doors, the first establishment of its kind to exist in the capital city for a long time. Neil Rhodes, a transplanted Californian and congenial host, has over the past year turned what was a great idea into an even better reality. He is now continuing to expand his endeavor to provide a premier place where military hobby enthusiasts can meet, confer, and of course, shop.

## AT A GLANCE

**FOCUS:**  
Sop Feature  
**TEXT & PHOTOS BY:**  
Brig. Gen. Raymond E. Bell Jr.

The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C. is located just off Pennsylvania Avenue on 11th Street Southeast in a recently reinvigorated part of southeast Washington easily reached by either the Orange or Blue Metro lines stopping at Eastern Market.

Neil describes the location as, "within sight of our Nation's Capitol building. It is housed in a restored row house in the Capitol Hill Historic District. Originally built in 1916 as a doctor's office, the former waiting and examination rooms are furnished with display cases offering a tempting assortment of antique and new toy soldiers, as well as vehicles, cannons, and equipment."

As a footnote he has added



INSIDE THE SHOP, NOTE NEIL'S WORK TABLE AT THE BACK

**NEIL'S WORK  
TABLE WITHIN  
THE SHOP WHERE  
YOU CAN WATCH  
AS HE CONVERTS  
AND PAINTS  
FIGURES DURING  
THE SHOPS  
OPENING HOURS**

that he is also offering such items as dress uniforms, helmets, and other military paraphernalia as well as war posters and books.

The store is open Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 10am to 5pm. He's also open "sometimes" during these hours on Monday, Tuesday, and Sunday. And Friday, during the summer months, Neil opens later from 3pm until 7pm. To be

sure he does not miss your visit he will see you by appointment or "by chance!" Now there's someone who really wants you to visit him, and he lives just around the corner but it's always best to give him a call or drop him an email to let him know you're coming.

Now this article is not meant to be an advertisement. It is rather intended to bring together the many enthusiasts in, or visiting, the Washington area who may be unknown to each other or who have heard names but cannot put those names to faces. This piece's purpose is also to point out that Neil's shop is an evolving enterprise, the final form of which is far from being decided. But one can see the direction in which he is going.

On a recent visit to the shop Neil made a point of showing me the neighborhood and its potential. The most significant thing about the area is that the historic United States Marine Corps barracks is located just three blocks away. For those visiting Washington in the spring and summer, a "must" is to visit the free Friday evening tattoo hosted by the Marine Corps contingent stationed in




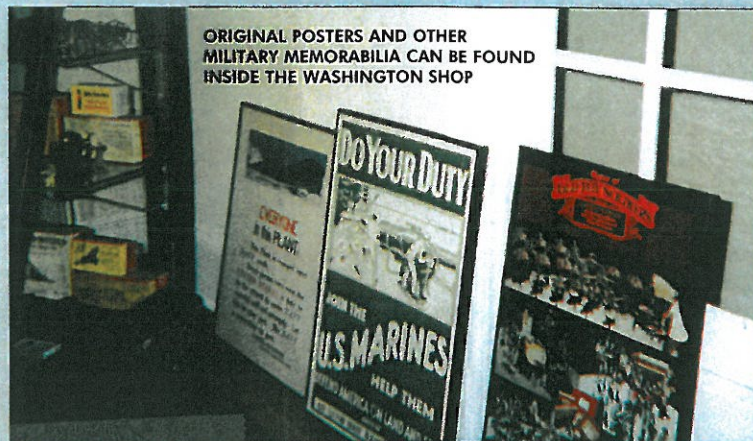
his work in progress and the potential of the enterprise.

Those of you who maybe familiar with Neil will know that he is a gifted master painter and figure converter. He specializes in custom conversions of antique Britains and other hollow cast toy soldier makers. Perched on a display case when I visited him was a newly produced set of

the barracks. This display includes a demonstration by the Marine Corps Silent Drill Team and music by elements of the world famous U.S. Marine Corps band. So, if the hours of The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C. seem a bit out of kilter, you now know why you can visit it in the summer time between 3pm and 7pm on Friday. You have plenty of time to get a nice meal at one of the up-scale restaurants in the area, visit Neil's shop, and find a place in the stands for the Marine show. I would not call this astute marketing on Neil's part so much as I would say that it is an example of how he views

American horse artillery, vintage 1898, with the cannoneers dressed in slouch hats and blue uniforms. He had just sold the six-horse gun team and limber with an officer, trumpeter, flag bearer, and two mounted cannoneers for the agreeable sum of \$450. I was fascinated by how close Neil had come to reproducing a set of figures that easily passed for quality painted mint Britains soldiers. The team will be a princely addition to any enthusiast's collection, and as Neil's specialty is artillery this particular work of art isn't an isolated set by any means.

Neil likes to take the more 



**ORIGINAL POSTERS AND OTHER  
MILITARY MEMORABILIA CAN BE FOUND  
INSIDE THE WASHINGTON SHOP**

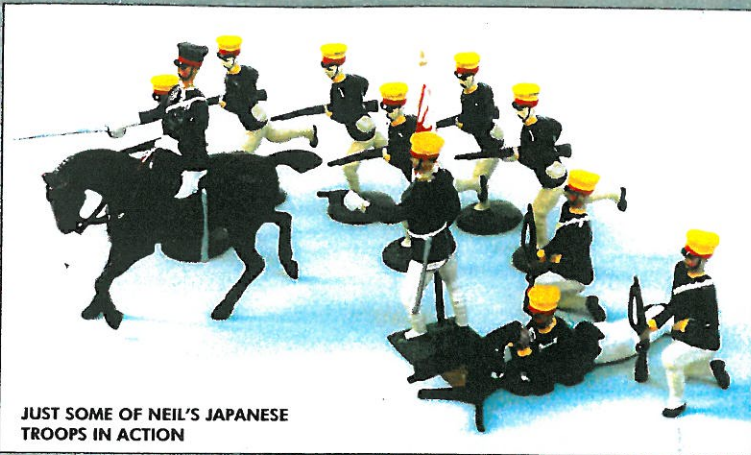
**SHOPPING CAPITAL** ↘

common Britains figures and "up-grade" them. One of his favorite periods is the Russo-Japanese War of the early 20th Century. He says he finds the uniforms colorful and interesting to paint, so he has converted not only infantry but cavalry figures of the Imperial Japanese Army. Another area which fascinates Neil is the early twentieth century Montenegrins. His excellent eye for reproducing the color schemes used by Britains is very evident in these repainted figures. Neil currently offers infantry at \$15 and cavalry at \$25 per piece.

The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C. also buy up part and complete collections which are then put on sale in the store. Considering the number of retired military personnel living in the area, many of whom collected toy soldiers in their youth, the shop usually has something interesting to offer. Neil is also always on the lookout for other items of militaria for the shop, so uniforms (whole or part) and other pieces of military equipment from ages past can often be found on display, and for sale.

His concept of a work in progress envisions having customers, acquaintances, friends, and even skeptics contribute to a friendly ambiance like those of the many other stores in the US and the rest of the World. Neil often consults with the many people he comes across who have new and innovative ideas on

**JUST SOME OF NEIL'S JAPANESE TROOPS IN ACTION**



producing, converting, painting, and even the marketing of figures. He has also determined to make his own work as a toy soldier maker/convertor transparent to his audience by establishing a workshop in the store. The enthusiasm he demonstrated in furnishing the building is sure to be on show when he greets you under the banner of The Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C.

It is with a great interest and a happy welcome that Neil brings to the capital city a means to indulge one's passion for toy soldiers. Those of you who know the quality of his work will appreciate the quality of this new enterprise. He is sure to convince you that his already well-established reputation for making beautiful conversions will be enhanced when you enter the shop and see his work in progress.

**CONSIDERING THE NUMBER OF RETIRED MILITARY PERSONNEL LIVING IN THE AREA, MANY OF WHOM COLLECTED TOY SOLDIERS IN THEIR YOUTH, THE SHOP USUALLY HAS SOMETHING INTERESTING TO OFFER.**

**A TORI FRAMES A FEW OF NEIL'S ATTACKING JAPANESE**

