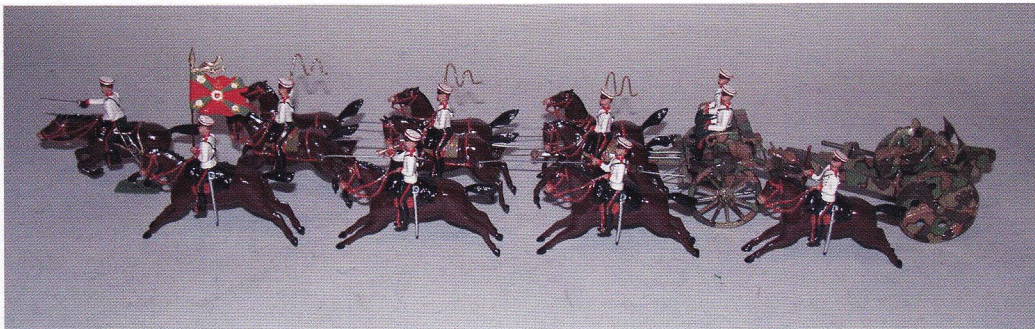
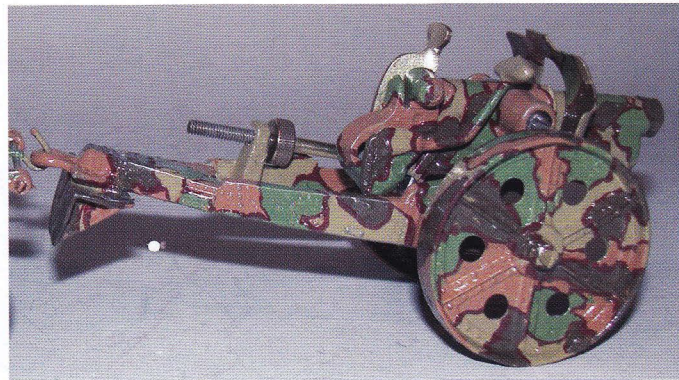


Artillery at Adrianople

Brigadier Raymond Bell looks at the work of Neil Rhodes, a maker of stunning, yet classic looking, sets of toy soldiers



The Bulgarian gun team in its traditional uniforms accompanied by mounted crew and flag bearer



The Britains 4.5 inch howitzer as modified with 155 gun spade and 4.7 inch naval gun wheels

The First Balkan War began in early October 1912 when a coalition of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece attacked the Ottoman possessions in the Balkans

For the toy soldier collector the 1912-13 Balkan Wars are a rich source of multi-uniformed and equipped figures. If you can find them. The wars themselves are but a footnote in history, taking place as they were in a then obscure part of Europe and just before the 'war to end all wars' of 1914-1918. But for artist and proprietor of The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C., Neil Rhodes, the era is a golden opportunity.

Neil, at the behest of a client, has taken a sliver of the action during the wars to create horse drawn artillery sets of two of the most prominent protagonists, the Ottoman Turks and the

Bulgarians. To set the scene for his work one can look to the artillery of both sides of the conflict, both in a general way and then more specifically at the siege and battle for the city of Adrianople/Edirne in Thrace or western Turkey (today) but also in what was once part of the European Ottoman Empire.

The First Balkan War began in early October 1912 when a coalition of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece attacked the Ottoman possessions in the Balkans. The Ottoman Turks had ruled in the Balkans for centuries, contributing nothing to the welfare of the people but plundering the populace

under oppressive conditions. The most prominent battles took place between the Bulgarian and Ottoman armies in Thrace. The reduction of the Ottoman fortress city of Adrianople by the Bulgarians became one of their principal objectives in the war.

The Second Bulgarian Army quickly encircled Adrianople which was manned by some 45,000 Ottoman soldiers. The Bulgarian advance into Ottoman territory was rapid at first but soon slowed down and then stopped, allowing the Ottoman Army to retreat and reorganize closer to the capital city of Constantinople. Adrianople, now being cut off from the main Ottoman Army settled down to a siege which became a desultory artillery duel. The resumed Bulgarian advance eastward became bogged down as it encountered dogged Ottoman resistance which was enhanced by heavy rains and extended Bulgarian lines of communication. Ottoman artillery also proved to be effective in slowing Bulgarian progress. On December 4, 1912 an armistice between the Ottoman Empire and the Serb, Montenegrin, and Bulgarian members of the Balkan League was agreed upon. The armistice, however, soon collapsed and fighting resumed.

Adrianople, although surrounded, had been lightly

The Bulgarian artillery consisted of both German and French weaponry and was organized in two different ways



The Bulgarian cannoneers ride Britains Royal Horse Artillery mounts

besieged and had never capitulated. The city fortress now became the primary Bulgarian objective of the resumed war. The Ottoman held fortress was strongly defended and its defensive capabilities had not been greatly reduced by the Bulgarian siege which had not been overly active.

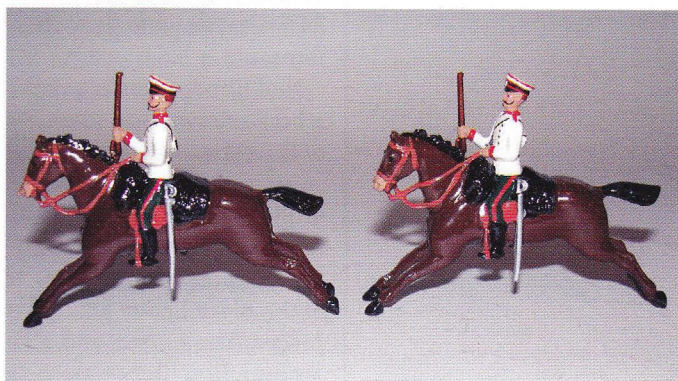
The fortress garrison consisted of one regular and three reserve infantry divisions. The artillery contingent was composed

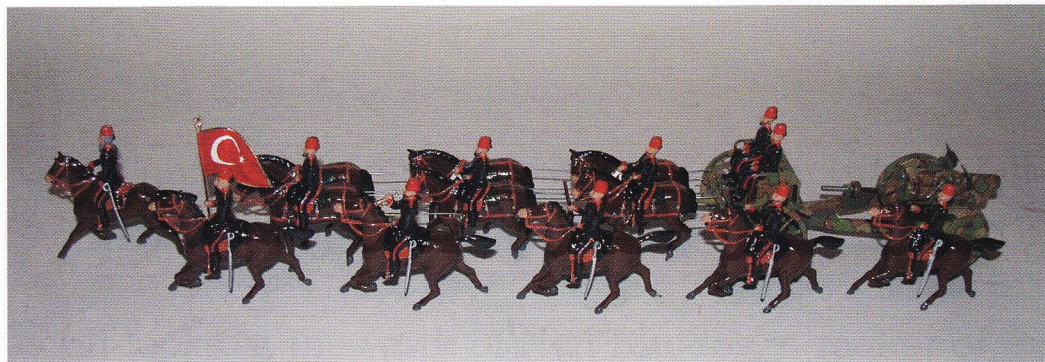
of ten field and two heavy artillery regiments. The Ottoman artillery organization was similar to that of the Bulgarians. In addition, German influence was prominent in the training and leadership of the Ottoman artillery arm.

The Bulgarian artillery consisted of both German and French weaponry and was organized in two different ways. The French Schneider-Cruessot rapid firing guns were 75mm →



The Bulgarian Flagbearer





The Ottoman gun team with its flag bearing escort. The representative artillery piece shoots

In order to replicate the correct Ottoman Turkish demeanor of the gun crew Neil has replaced the former heads with those bearing a fez and a goatee

→ and were the more modern cannons in the Bulgarian inventory. They were organized into regiments consisting of three battalions. Each battalion had three batteries of four guns each making a total of 36 artillery pieces in the regiment.

The German guns were older weapons manufactured by the armament firm of Krupp and known as 'non-quick' firing pieces. There were essentially two types of gun, the 75mm and heavier 87mm cannon. A regiment was composed of two battalions. Each battalion had three batteries of four guns each. A total of 24 weapons were in each regiment.

Neil Rhodes has created a horse drawn gun team of Bulgarian artillery accompanied by a mounted artillery detachment with flag bearer and officer. The howitzer represents one of the older heavy Krupp pieces. The horses and ammunition limber are standard Britains figures. On the other hand, the gun, which fires, is constructed from three different Britains



The mounted Ottoman gunners on Britains walking teams wear the traditional fez and their faces have goatees

weapons. He has taken the spade from the 155mm 'Long Tom' gun (Set 9745) and attached it to the trail of a 4.5 inch howitzer (Set 1725) and used the wheels of set number 9730, the 4.7 inch naval gun in the place of the howitzer's rubber tires. He then painted the howitzer in the unique German camouflage pattern that was prevalent in the German Army at that time.

The Bulgarian gun crew wears the traditional white blouse and green trousers with a red strip down the side. The gunners all have flowing mustaches typical of soldiers' tonsorial style of the period. The colorful Bulgarian flag bears the royal design. The horses are repainted versions of those of Britains set #39 of Royal Horse Artillery.

The Ottoman gun has the mounted cannoneers in the standard blue duty uniform worn before the introduction of the khaki color. It was not until WWI that the Ottoman Army adopted the plain khaki uniform which one normally see Ottoman soldiers wearing. In order to replicate the correct Ot-

toman Turkish demeanor of the gun crew Neil has replaced the former heads with those bearing a fez and a goatee. The officer, on the other hand, has the head of the Britains train station master (Set 802) with his long beard. As to the howitzer Neil has used the same converted weapon and painting technique as he did with the Bulgarian howitzer. Interestingly enough the Ottoman artillery was mostly of German Krupp manufacture, about one half of which was considered modern.

According to an American observer of the wars, the Ottoman Turks handled their artillery poorly and supposedly offered inefficient service, this in spite of its role in slowing the October 1912 Bulgarian Army advance. He attributed the problem to that of developing an effective arm. This was because the available manpower lacked enough elementary education and mechanical competence to properly serve the guns. He did say, however, that some of their batteries could put on a good show at drill or





Accompanying the Ottoman gun team is a detachment led by an officer and Ottoman flag bearer



The Ottoman officer with his Britains train station master bearded head


on maneuvers but lacked the ability to perform more intricate operations required for bringing effective fire on an enemy.

So what happened at the battle of Adrianople? The Second Bulgarian Army, reinforced by two Serb infantry divisions brought the total of besiegers to more than 100,000 men. In March 1913 the Bulgarian/Serb Army got down to serious business. On March 24, the Bulgarian artillery

opened up on the Ottoman defensive positions and fired for almost eight hours inflicting much damage. The intense bombardment was followed by two days of brutal combat which finally resulted in the capitulation of the fortress. Thus ended the Thracian campaign of the First Balkan War.

The surrender of Adrianople, however, did not end the war which also included heavy Greek Army participation and fighting. In the

second of the Balkan Wars the Ottoman Empire was not a primary belligerent as the Balkan League fractured and the Bulgarians ended up fighting the Greeks, Serbs, and Montenegrins. The Ottoman Empire recovered Adrianople in an almost resistance less two week advance starting on July 12, 1913. A peace conference begun July 28 resulted in the Ottoman Turks receiving the fortress city back from the Bulgarians. The Ottoman Empire, however, was not long to exist as it had sided with the Central Powers of Austria/Hungary and Germany in WWI and was broken up as a result of being on the losing side at the end of the conflict.

The two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 were messy affairs. Neil Rhodes' depiction of some of the horse drawn artillery of both the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria is crisp and clean. The gun teams are on parade. They belie the mud, rain, filth, and havoc of the actual battlefields where they were employed. But as beautifully executed sets, these two opposing teams of mobile artillery deserve an appropriate place in anyone's toy soldier collection. 

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CONTACT

The Toy Soldier Shop of Washington, D.C.

Tel: +1 202 546 2201

www.toysoldiershop.com