

Little Wars

(A Game 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)

With an Appendix on Kriegspiel

By

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LITTLE WARS AND KRIEGSPIEL

I

OF THE LEGENDARY PAST

"LITTLE WARS" is the game of kings—for players in an inferior social position. It can be played by boys of every age from twelve to one hundred and fifty—and even later if the limbs remain sufficiently supple—by girls of the better sort, and by a few rare and gifted women. This is to be a full History of Little Wars from its recorded and authenticated beginning until the present time, an account of how to make little warfare, and hints of the most priceless sort for the recumbent strategist....

But first let it be noted in passing that there were prehistoric "Little Wars." This is no new thing, no crude novelty; but a thing tested by time, ancient and ripe in its essentials for all its perennial freshness—like spring. There was a Someone who fought Little Wars in the days of Queen Anne; a garden Napoleon. His game was inaccurately observed and insufficiently recorded by Laurence Sterne. It is clear that Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim were playing Little Wars on a scale and with an elaboration exceeding even the richness and beauty of the contemporary game. But the curtain is drawn back only to tantalise us. It is scarcely conceivable that anywhere now on earth the Shandean Rules remain on record. Perhaps they were never committed to paper....

And in all ages a certain barbaric warfare has been waged with

soldiers of tin and lead and wood, with the weapons of the wild, with the catapult, the elastic circular garter, the peashooter, the rubber ball, and such-like appliances—a mere setting up and knocking down of men. Tin murder. The advance of civilisation has swept such rude contests altogether from the playroom. We know them no more....

II

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN LITTLE WARFARE

THE beginning of the game of Little War, as we know it, became possible with the invention of the spring breechloader gun. This priceless gift to boyhood appeared somewhen towards the end of the last century, a gun capable of hitting a toy soldier nine times out of ten at a distance of nine yards. It has completely superseded all the spiral-spring and other makes of gun hitherto used in playroom warfare. These spring breechloaders are made in various sizes and patterns, but the one used in our game is that known in England as the four-point-seven gun. It fires a wooden cylinder about an inch long, and has a screw adjustment for elevation and depression. It is an altogether elegant weapon.

It was with one of these guns that the beginning of our war game was made. It was at Sandgate—in England.

The present writer had been lunching with a friend—let me veil his

identity under the initials J. K. J.—in a room littered with the irrepressible debris of a small boy's pleasures. On a table near our own stood four or five soldiers and one of these guns. Mr J. K. J., his more urgent needs satisfied and the coffee imminent, drew a chair to this little table, sat down, examined the gun discreetly, loaded it warily, aimed, and hit his man. Thereupon he boasted of the deed, and issued challenges that were accepted with avidity....

He fired that day a shot that still echoes round the world. An affair—let us parallel the Cannonade of Valmy and call it the Cannonade of Sandgate—occurred, a shooting between opposed ranks of soldiers, a shooting not very different in spirit—but how different in results!—from the prehistoric warfare of catapult and garter. "But suppose," said his antagonists; "suppose somehow one could move the men!" and therewith opened a new world of belligerence.

The matter went no further with Mr J. K. J. The seed lay for a time gathering strength, and then began to germinate with another friend, Mr W. To Mr W. was broached the idea: "I believe that if one set up a few obstacles on the floor, volumes of the British Encyclopedia and so forth, to make a Country, and moved these soldiers and guns about, one could have rather a good game, a kind of kriegspiel."...

Primitive attempts to realise the dream were interrupted by a great rustle and chattering of lady visitors. They regarded the objects upon the floor with the empty disdain of their sex for all imaginative things.

But the writer had in those days a very dear friend, a man too ill for long excursions or vigorous sports (he has been dead now these six years), of a very sweet companionable disposition, a hearty jester and full of the spirit of play. To him the idea was broached more fruitfully. We got two forces of toy soldiers, set out a lumpish

Encyclopaedic land upon the carpet, and began to play. We arranged to move in alternate moves: first one moved all his force and then the other; an infantry-man could move one foot at each move, a cavalry-man two, a gun two, and it might fire six shots; and if a man was moved up to touch another man, then we tossed up and decided which man was dead. So we made a game, which was not a good game, but which was very amusing once or twice. The men were packed under the lee of fat volumes, while the guns, animated by a spirit of their own, banged away at any exposed head, or prowled about in search of a shot. Occasionally men came into contact, with remarkable results. Rash is the man who trusts his life to the spin of a coin. One impossible paladin slew in succession nine men and turned defeat to victory, to the extreme exasperation of the strategist who had led those victims to their doom. This inordinate factor of chance eliminated play; the individual freedom of guns turned battles into scandals of crouching concealment; there was too much cover afforded by the books and vast intervals of waiting while the players took aim. And yet there was something about it.... It was a game crying aloud for improvement.

Improvement came almost simultaneously in several directions. First there was the development of the Country. The soldiers did not stand well on an ordinary carpet, the Encyclopedia made clumsy cliff-like "cover", and more particularly the room in which the game had its beginnings was subject to the invasion of callers, alien souls, trampling skirt-swishers, chatterers, creatures unfavourably impressed by the spectacle of two middle-aged men playing with "toy soldiers" on the floor, and very heated and excited about it. Overhead was the day nursery, with a wide extent of smooth cork carpet (the natural terrain of toy soldiers), a large box of bricks—such as I have described in Floor Games—and certain large inch-thick boards.

It was an easy task for the head of the household to evict his

offspring, annex these advantages, and set about planning a more realistic country. (I forget what became of the children.) The thick boards were piled up one upon another to form hills; holes were bored in them, into which twigs of various shrubs were stuck to represent trees; houses and sheds (solid and compact piles of from three to six or seven inches high, and broad in proportion) and walls were made with the bricks; ponds and swamps and rivers, with fords and so forth indicated, were chalked out on the floor, garden stones were brought in to represent great rocks, and the "Country" at least of our perfected war game was in existence. We discovered it was easy to cut out and bend and gum together paper and cardboard walls, into which our toy bricks could be packed, and on which we could paint doors and windows, creepers and rain-water pipes, and so forth, to represent houses, castles, and churches in a more realistic manner, and, growing skilful, we made various bridges and so forth of card. Every boy who has ever put together model villages knows how to do these things, and the attentive reader will find them edifyingly represented in our photographic illustrations.

There has been little development since that time in the Country. Our illustrations show the methods of arrangement, and the reader will see how easily and readily the utmost variety of battlefields can be made. (It is merely to be remarked that a too crowded Country makes the guns ineffective and leads to a mere tree to tree and house to house scramble, and that large open spaces along the middle, or rivers without frequent fords and bridges, lead to ineffective cannonades, because of the danger of any advance. On the whole, too much cover is better than too little.) We decided that one player should plan and lay out the Country, and the other player choose from which side he would come. And to-day we play over such landscapes in a cork-carpeted schoolroom, from which the proper occupants are no longer evicted but remain to take an increasingly responsible and less and less audible and distressing share in the operations.

We found it necessary to make certain general rules. Houses and sheds must be made of solid lumps of bricks, and not hollow so that soldiers can be put inside them, because otherwise muddled situations arise. And it was clearly necessary to provide for the replacement of disturbed objects by chalking out the outlines of boards and houses upon the floor or boards upon which they stood.

And while we thus perfected the Country, we were also eliminating all sorts of tediums, disputable possibilities, and deadlocks from the game. We decided that every man should be as brave and skilful as every other man, and that when two men of opposite sides came into contact they would inevitably kill each other. This restored strategy to its predominance over chance.

We then began to humanise that wild and fearful fowl, the gun. We decided that a gun could not be fired if there were not six—afterwards we reduced the number to four—men within six inches of it. And we ruled that a gun could not both fire and move in the same general move: it could either be fired or moved (or left alone). If there were less than six men within six inches of a gun, then we tried letting it fire as many shots as there were men, and we permitted a single man to move a gun, and move with it as far as he could go by the rules—a foot, that is, if he was an infantryman, and two feet if he was a cavalryman. We abolished altogether that magical freedom of an unassisted gun to move two feet. And on such rules as these we fought a number of battles. They were interesting, but not entirely satisfactory. We took no prisoners—a feature at once barbaric and unconvincing. The battles lingered on a long time, because we shot with extreme care and deliberation, and they were hard to bring to a decisive finish. The guns were altogether too predominant. They prevented attacks

getting home, and they made it possible for a timid player to put all his soldiers out of sight behind hills and houses, and bang away if his opponent showed as much as the tip of a bayonet. Monsieur Bloch seemed vindicated, and Little War had become impossible. And there was something a little absurd, too, in the spectacle of a solitary drummer-boy, for example, marching off with a gun.

But as there was nevertheless much that seemed to us extremely pretty and picturesque about the game, we set to work—and here a certain Mr M. with his brother, Captain M., hot from the Great War in South Africa, came in most helpfully—to quicken it. Manifestly the guns had to be reduced to manageable terms. We cut down the number of shots per move to four, and we required that four men should be within six inches of a gun for it to be in action at all. Without four men it could neither fire nor move—it was out of action; and if it moved, the four men had to go with it. Moreover, to put an end to that little resistant body of men behind a house, we required that after a gun had been fired it should remain, without alteration of the elevation, pointing in the direction of its last shot, and have two men placed one on either side of the end of its trail. This secured a certain exposure on the part of concealed and sheltered gunners. It was no longer possible to go on shooting out of a perfect security for ever. All this favoured the attack and led to a livelier game.

Our next step was to abolish the tedium due to the elaborate aiming of the guns, by fixing a time limit for every move. We made this an outside limit at first, ten minutes, but afterwards we discovered that it made the game much more warlike to cut the time down to a length that would barely permit a slow-moving player to fire all his guns and move all his men. This led to small bodies of men lagging and "getting left," to careless exposures, to rapid, less accurate shooting, and just that eventfulness one would expect in the hurry and passion of real fighting. It also made the game brisker. We have since also made a limit, sometimes of four

minutes, sometimes of five minutes, to the interval for adjustment and deliberation after one move is finished and before the next move begins. This further removes the game from the chess category, and approximates it to the likeness of active service. Most of a general's decisions, once a fight has begun, must be made in such brief intervals of time. (But we leave unlimited time at the outset for the planning.)

As to our time-keeping, we catch a visitor with a stop-watch if we can, and if we cannot, we use a fair-sized clock with a second-hand: the player not moving says "Go," and warns at the last two minutes, last minute, and last thirty seconds. But I think it would not be difficult to procure a cheap clock—because, of course, no one wants a very accurate agreement with Greenwich as to the length of a second—that would have minutes instead of hours and seconds instead of minutes, and that would ping at the end of every minute and discharge an alarm note at the end of the move. That would abolish the rather boring strain of time-keeping. One could just watch the fighting.

Moreover, in our desire to bring the game to a climax, we decided that instead of a fight to a finish we would fight to some determined point, and we found very good sport in supposing that the arrival of three men of one force upon the back line of the opponent's side of the country was of such strategic importance as to determine the battle. But this form of battle we have since largely abandoned in favour of the old fight to a finish again. We found it led to one type of battle only, a massed rush at the antagonist's line, and that our arrangements of time-limits and capture and so forth had eliminated most of the concluding drag upon the game.

Our game was now very much in its present form. We considered at various times the possibility of introducing some complication due to the bringing up of ammunition or supplies generally, and we

decided that it would add little to the interest or reality of the game. Our battles are little brisk fights in which one may suppose that all the ammunition and food needed are carried by the men themselves.

But our latest development has been in the direction of killing hand to hand or taking prisoners. We found it necessary to distinguish between an isolated force and a force that was merely a projecting part of a larger force. We made a definition of isolation. After a considerable amount of trials we decided that a man or a detachment shall be considered to be isolated when there is less than half its number of its own side within a move of it. Now, in actual civilised warfare small detached bodies do not sell their lives dearly; a considerably larger force is able to make them prisoners without difficulty. Accordingly we decided that if a blue force, for example, has one or more men isolated, and a red force of at least double the strength of this isolated detachment moves up to contact with it, the blue men will be considered to be prisoners.

That seemed fair; but so desperate is the courage and devotion of lead soldiers, that it came to this, that any small force that got or seemed likely to get isolated and caught by a superior force instead of waiting to be taken prisoners, dashed at its possible captors and slew them man for man. It was manifestly unreasonable to permit this. And in considering how best to prevent such inhuman heroisms, we were reminded of another frequent incident in our battles that also erred towards the incredible and vitiated our strategy. That was the charging of one or two isolated horse-men at a gun in order to disable it. Let me illustrate this by an incident. A force consisting of ten infantry and five cavalry with a gun are retreating across an exposed space, and a gun with thirty men, cavalry and infantry, in support comes out upon a crest into a position to fire within two feet of the retreating cavalry. The attacking player puts eight men within six inches of his gun and pushes the rest of his men a little forward to the right or left in

pursuit of his enemy. In the real thing, the retreating horsemen would go off to cover with the gun, "hell for leather," while the infantry would open out and retreat, firing. But see what happened in our imperfect form of Little War! The move of the retreating player began. Instead of retreating his whole force, he charged home with his mounted desperadoes, killed five of the eight men about the gun, and so by the rule silenced it, enabling the rest of his little body to get clean away to cover at the leisurely pace of one foot a move. This was not like any sort of warfare. In real life cavalry cannot pick out and kill its equivalent in cavalry while that equivalent is closely supported by other cavalry or infantry; a handful of troopers cannot gallop past well and abundantly manned guns in action, cut down the gunners and interrupt the fire. And yet for a time we found it a little difficult to frame simple rules to meet these two bad cases and prevent such scandalous possibilities. We did at last contrive to do so; we invented what we call the melee, and our revised rules in the event of a melee will be found set out upon a later page. They do really permit something like an actual result to hand-to-hand encounters. They abolish Horatius Cocles.

We also found difficulties about the capturing of guns. At first we had merely provided that a gun was captured when it was out of action and four men of the opposite force were within six inches of it, but we found a number of cases for which this rule was too vague. A gun, for example, would be disabled and left with only three men within six inches; the enemy would then come up eight or ten strong within six inches on the other side, but not really reaching the gun. At the next move the original possessor of the gun would bring up half a dozen men within six inches. To whom did the gun belong? By the original wording of our rule, it might be supposed to belong to the attack which had never really touched

the gun yet, and they could claim to turn it upon its original side. We had to meet a number of such cases. We met them by requiring the capturing force—or, to be precise, four men of it—actually to pass the axle of the gun before it could be taken.

All sorts of odd little difficulties arose too, connected with the use of the guns as a shelter from fire, and very exact rules had to be made to avoid tilting the nose and raising the breech of a gun in order to use it as cover....

We still found it difficult to introduce any imitation into our game of either retreat or the surrender of men not actually taken prisoners in a melee. Both things were possible by the rules, but nobody did them because there was no inducement to do them. Games were apt to end obstinately with the death or capture of the last man. An inducement was needed. This we contrived by playing not for the game but for points, scoring the result of each game and counting the points towards the decision of a campaign. Our campaign was to our single game what a rubber is to a game of whist. We made the end of a war 200, 300, or 400 or more points up, according to the number of games we wanted to play, and we scored a hundred for each battle won, and in addition 1 for each infantry-man, 1-1/2 for each cavalry-man, 10 for each gun, 1/2 for each man held prisoner by the enemy, and 1/2 for each prisoner held at the end of the game, subtracting what the antagonist scored by the same scale. Thus, when he felt the battle was hopelessly lost, he had a direct inducement to retreat any guns he could still save and surrender any men who were under the fire of the victors' guns and likely to be slaughtered, in order to minimise the score against him. And an interest was given to a skilful retreat, in which the loser not only saved points for himself but inflicted losses upon the pursuing enemy.

At first we played the game from the outset, with each player's force within sight of his antagonist; then we found it possible to

hang a double curtain of casement cloth from a string stretched across the middle of the field, and we drew this back only after both sides had set out their men. Without these curtains we found the first player was at a heavy disadvantage, because he displayed all his dispositions before his opponent set down his men.

And at last our rules have reached stability, and we regard them now with the virtuous pride of men who have persisted in a great undertaking and arrived at precision after much tribulation. There is not a piece of constructive legislation in the world, not a solitary attempt to meet a complicated problem, that we do not now regard the more charitably for our efforts to get a right result from this apparently easy and puerile business of fighting with tin soldiers on the floor.

And so our laws all made, battles have been fought, the mere beginnings, we feel, of vast campaigns. The game has become in a dozen aspects extraordinarily like a small real battle. The plans are made, the Country hastily surveyed, and then the curtains are closed, and the antagonists make their opening dispositions. Then the curtains are drawn back and the hostile forces come within sight of each other; the little companies and squadrons and batteries appear hurrying to their positions, the infantry deploying into long open lines, the cavalry sheltering in reserve, or galloping with the guns to favourable advance positions.

In two or three moves the guns are flickering into action, a cavalry melee may be in progress, the plans of the attack are more or less apparent, here are men pouring out from the shelter of a wood to secure some point of vantage, and here are troops massing among farm buildings for a vigorous attack. The combat grows hot round some vital point. Move follows move in swift succession. One realises with a sickening sense of error that one is outnumbered and hard pressed here and uselessly cut off there, that one's guns are ill-placed, that one's wings are spread too widely, and that help

can come only over some deadly zone of fire.

So the fight wears on. Guns are lost or won, hills or villages stormed or held; suddenly it grows clear that the scales are tilting beyond recovery, and the loser has nothing left but to contrive how he may get to the back line and safety with the vestiges of his command....

But let me, before I go on to tell of actual battles and campaigns, give here a summary of our essential rules.

III

THE RULES

HERE, then, are the rules of the perfect battle-game as we play it in an ordinary room.

THE COUNTRY

(1) The Country must be arranged by one player, who, failing any other agreement, shall be selected by the toss of a coin.

(2) The other player shall then choose which side of the field he will fight from.

(3) The Country must be disturbed as little as possible in each move. Nothing in the Country shall be moved or set aside deliberately to facilitate the firing of guns. A player must not lie across the Country so as to crush or disturb the Country if his opponent objects. Whatever is moved by accident shall be replaced after the end of the move.

THE MOVE

(1) After the Country is made and the sides chosen, then (and not until then) the players shall toss for the first move.

(2) If there is no curtain, the player winning the toss, hereafter called the First Player, shall next arrange his men along his back line, as he chooses. Any men he may place behind or in front of his back line shall count in the subsequent move as if they touched the back line at its nearest point. The Second Player shall then do the same. But if a curtain is available both first and second player may put down their men at the same time. Both players may take unlimited time for the putting down of their men; if there is a curtain it is drawn back when they are ready, and the game then begins.

(3) The subsequent moves after the putting down are timed. The length of time given for each move is determined by the size of the forces engaged. About a minute should be allowed for moving 30 men and a minute for each gun. Thus for a force of 110 men and 3 guns, moved by one player, seven minutes is an ample allowance. As the battle progresses and the men are killed off, the allowance is reduced as the players may agree. The player about to move stands at attention a yard behind his back line until the timekeeper says "Go." He then proceeds to make his move until time is up. He must instantly stop at the cry of "Time." Warning should be given by the timekeeper two minutes, one minute, and thirty seconds before time is up. There will be an interval before the next move, during which any disturbance of the Country can be rearranged and men accidentally overturned replaced in a proper attitude. This interval must not exceed five or four minutes, as may be agreed upon.

(4) Guns must not be fired before the second move of the first player—not counting the "putting down" as a move. Thus the first player puts down, then the second player, the first player moves, then the second player, and the two forces are then supposed to come into effective range of each other and the first player may open fire if he wishes to do so.

(5) In making his move a player must move or fire his guns if he wants to do so, before moving his men. To this rule of "Guns First" there is to be no exception.

(6) Every soldier may be moved and every gun moved or fired at each move, subject to the following rules:

MOBILITY OF THE VARIOUS ARMS

(Each player must be provided with two pieces of string, one two feet in length and the other six inches.)

(I) An infantry-man may be moved a foot or any less distance at each move.

(II) A cavalry-man may be moved two feet or any less distance at each move.

(III) A gun is in action if there are at least four men of its own side within six inches of it. If there are not at least four men within that distance, it can neither be moved nor fired.

(IV) If a gun is in action it can either be moved or fired at each move, but not both. If it is fired, it may fire as many as four shots in each move. It may be swung round on its axis (the middle point of its wheel axle) to take aim, provided the Country about it permits; it may be elevated or depressed, and the soldiers about it may, at the discretion of the firer, be made to lie down in their places to facilitate its handling. Moreover, soldiers who have got in front of the fire of their own guns may lie down while the guns fire over them. At the end of the move the gun must be left without altering its elevation and pointing in the direction of the last shot. And after firing, two men must be placed exactly at the end of the trail of the gun, one on either side in a line directly behind the wheels. So much for firing. If the gun is moved and not fired, then at least four men who are with the gun must move up with it to its new position, and be placed within six inches of it in its new position. The gun itself must be placed trail forward and the muzzle pointing back in the direction from which it came, and so it must remain until it is swung round on its axis to fire. Obviously the distance which a gun can move will be determined by the men it is with; if there are at least four cavalry-men with it, they can take the gun two feet, but if there are fewer cavalry-men than four and the rest infantry, or no cavalry and all infantry, the gun will be movable only one foot.

(V) Every man must be placed fairly clear of hills, buildings, trees, guns, etc. He must not be jammed into interstices, and either player may insist upon a clear distance between any man and any gun or other object of at least one-sixteenth of an inch. Nor must men be packed in contact with men. A space of one-sixteenth of an inch should be kept between them.

(VI) When men are knocked over by a shot they are dead, and as many men are dead as a shot knocks over or causes to fall or to lean so that they would fall if unsupported. But if a shot strikes a man but does not knock him over, he is dead,

provided the shot has not already killed a man. But a shot cannot kill more than one man without knocking him over, and if it touches several without oversetting them, only the first touched is dead and the others are not incapacitated. A shot that rebounds from or glances off any object and touches a man, kills him; it kills him even if it simply rolls to his feet, subject to what has been said in the previous sentence.

HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING AND CAPTURING

(1) A man or a body of men which has less than half its own number of men on its own side within a move of it, is said to be isolated. But if there is at least half its number of men of its own side within a move of it, it is not isolated; it is supported.

(2) Men may be moved up into virtual contact (one-eighth of an inch or closer) with men of the opposite side. They must then be left until the end of the move.

(3) At the end of the move, if there are men of the side that has just moved in contact with any men of the other side, they constitute a melee. All the men in contact, and any other men within six inches of the men in contact, measuring from any point of their persons, weapons, or horses, are supposed to take part in the melee. At the end of the move the two players examine the melee and dispose of the men concerned according to the following rules:—

Either the numbers taking part in the melee on each side are equal or unequal.

(a) If they are equal, all the men on both sides are killed.

(b) If they are unequal, then the inferior force is either isolated or (measuring from the points of contact) not isolated.

(i) If it is isolated (see (1) above), then as many men become prisoners as the inferior force is less in numbers than the superior force, and the rest kill each a man and are killed. Thus nine against eleven have two taken prisoners, and each side seven men dead. Four of the eleven remain with two prisoners. One may put this in another way by saying that the two forces kill each other off, man for man, until one force is double the other, which is then taken prisoner. Seven men kill seven men, and then four are left with two.

(ii) But if the inferior force is not isolated (see (1) above), then each man of the

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