

A visit to the Prince August Toy Soldier Factory in Kilnamartyra reveals a fascinating re-construction of the Battle of Waterloo, featuring 15,000 models, which took 8 years to make

By Tricia Tyson Photos Hetty Walsh

Tiny Village Houses Reconstruction of the Battle of Waterloo

It is hard to imagine in these days of iPads and X-Boxes that toy soldiers were once top of every little boy's Christmas wish list. A brightly painted tin soldier is an enduring festive image and *The Nutcracker*, the tale of a toy soldier who turns into a prince, remains one of the best loved Christmas stories of all time. Military miniatures have been around since the time of the Pharaohs but were a luxury reserved for the children of the rich and powerful. As a child, French King Louis XIII commanded an army of 300 solid silver toy soldiers while the son of Napoleon had a 117-strong regiment crafted from gold. It wasn't until the end of the 18th century that toy soldiers were mass-produced, originally in Germany or France and later in the UK. The writer HG Wells is credited with introducing the concept of fighting miniature battles in his 1913 book, 'Little Wars', which contained detailed rules for playing war games with toy soldiers. Wells was a pacifist who hoped that miniature warfare would provide a cathartic experience and avoid real battlefield confrontation. His optimism was sadly misplaced. British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill owned a toy army numbering 1,500 but even this failed to blunt his

appetite for battle. As times changed and children's tastes became more sophisticated, toy soldiers were superseded by more interactive toys. But for many who grew up commanding their own tiny armies, the appeal never faded.

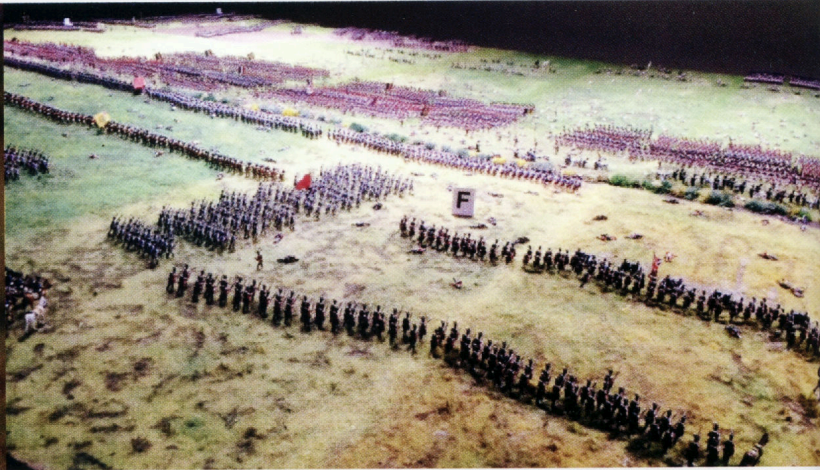
Among their number is **Lars Edman**, a Swede who relocated to the tiny West Cork village of Kilnamartyra near Macroom in the mid-'70s and opened the **Prince August Toy Soldier Factory**, the only one of its kind in Europe.

Created by a German Restaurateur

Lars told *The Opinion*: 'My father had a toy shop near Stockholm. When I was about 9, I found some old casts for toy soldiers but the problem was that all the factories had closed, so I decided to start making my own. Toy soldiers seems to be a hobby that many people keep for a lifetime. That was how it started for me.' Thirty years on, Lars exports his military moulds to enthusiasts across the globe and it was one of those devotees who provided Lars with the spectacular centrepiece



for the Prince August Visitors Centre – a diorama depicting the Battle of Waterloo which took place 200 years ago on 18th June 1815. Lars explained how he came to be in possession of the extraordinary reconstruction featuring 15,000 perfectly painted models: 'I found the battle scene on the internet and contacted the creator, a German restaurateur called Andre Rudolph who lives in Cologne. He is around 35 years old and spent 8 years of his life casting and painting the soldiers. We calculated he must have made five figures every single day to fill the battlefield.' Lars travelled to Cologne to see the scene for himself and was so impressed he arranged to borrow it. The battlefield was in one solid piece measuring 8m by 4m with all the figures glued into position so it had to be broken down for transport to Ireland. It eventually arrived in 44 carefully labelled sections and was





Lars Edman, the owner, meticulously places a model toy soldier in position

painstakingly reconstructed in Kilnamartyra. The result is nothing short of spectacular and people who have visited the original battlefield in Belgium testify to its accuracy. Music from the era, played in the thick of battle to rally troop morale, floats over the battle scene, lending an added air of authenticity. Creator Andre Rudolph is already hard at work building an extension to the battlefield featuring a further 4,000 models.

Wellington born in Dublin

While Waterloo is widely regarded as an English victory over the French, the Duke of Wellington was actually born in Dublin and three Irish regiments took part in the conflict – the 27th Foot Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons and the 18th King's Irish Hussars. Also fighting on Wellington's side against

the French Grande Armée were Germans, Belgians, Dutch and Prussians. Every uniform and weapon is historically accurate as are depictions of the four military leaders – Wellington, Marshal Blücher, the Prince of Orange and Napoleon. Historians estimate that 8,500 Irishmen made up 30% of Wellington's fighting force and at least 2,000 were killed or injured at the Battle of Waterloo. Wellington later

said: 'Nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won.'

This shocking loss of life was acknowledged during the official 200th anniversary commemorations in the summer, but there can be no more interesting or unusual tribute to the fallen of Waterloo than the battlefield reconstruction at the Prince August Toy Soldier Factory in Kilnamartyra.

The Prince August Toy Soldier Factory in Kilnamartyra, Macroom is open all year round apart from a Christmas break, offering workshops, moulding demonstrations and educational visits. For details and opening hours go to www.princeaugust.ie or call 026 40222

