



Letter From the North Pole

by William R. Hawkins

Counterrevolution in Toyland

Among the hottest selling items in toy stores across the land is the "G.I. Joe" series of military action figures. Since the "Star Wars" movies, war toys have made a strong comeback from their depressed levels during the "antiwar" 1970's. Model figures based on "Star Wars" characters proved so successful that others quickly entered the market of both science fiction and conventional conflict—everything from warrior robots to "Rambo." However, G.I. Joe is by far the most ambitious line, backed by a syndicated daily TV cartoon series and two monthly Marvel comic book series.

G.I. Joe is also a survivor. Some two decades ago, Joe appeared, looking like Barbie's boyfriend, Ken, after basic training. This was not an entirely successful format, little boys being none too keen about joining their sisters in playing with dolls. But in the 1970's, Joe's format changed. He was reduced in size to fit the toy rather than the doll market. He was also reduced in status to fit the political mood. He grew a beard and quit the military. He undertook peaceful missions of exploration or went about rescuing accident victims. But Joe found, as did the rest of the country, that it was difficult to keep fit while remaining a pacifist. He seems much happier now that he is back in uniform packing an Uzi or driving a tank instead of pulling some errant skier out of a snowbank.

Toys can reflect swings in the larger public mood. They say also influence that mood. This is something that liberals, with their constant harping against war toys, have paid more attention to than have conservatives, the theory being that a sissy at age 10 will

be a wimp at age 30. Yet, war toys are ever popular among youngsters, thus confounding the dreams of liberals since Rousseau. On this score, no one has improved on Saki's story "The Toys of Peace" in depicting a basic trait of human nature.

G.I. Joe appears on the surface to be simply a commercial venture. No angle has been overlooked that might make money. Not only is there a staggering array of character figures and vehicles running from motorcycles to mobile artillery, jet fighters, and even an aircraft carrier (the latter retailing for around \$100 sans aircraft and crew); there are also lunch boxes, coloring books, bars of soap shaped like hovercraft, and an educational magazine. But embedded in this barrage of products is a message with cultural and political import.

There are some 60 individual members of the G.I. Joe organization, which is billed as an elite multiservice antiterrorist/special missions unit. The unit's members come from all racial and ethnic groups. There are even three female troopers. But loyalty, not mere equality, is the point. Whatever their background, the Joes are American soldiers first.

Each soldier has a background history, and it is in these histories that a definite value pattern is found. "Airborne" is the son of "oil-rich Nava-

hos." He earned a law degree but quit private practice to become a paratrooper because he would "rather jump out of airplanes than write legal briefs." "Cover Girl" was a successful New York fashion model until she "grew disillusioned . . . and enlisted to put new direction in her life." Her specialty now is armor. "Mainframe" was a computer genius from MIT and had a high-paying job in Silicon Valley, but he chucked it all to join the Marines. "Footloose" dropped out of college and "became quite weird for three years" until it hit him that his existence had no purpose. He enlisted in the combat infantry. "Flint" was a Rhodes Scholar who became "bored with the Groves of Academe." And the list goes on.

In each case, a particular aspect of modern American society is found shallow and unfulfilling. Usually, it is the identification of success with material reward, the plague of the "me" generation, that is rejected. But rejection is not enough. "Footloose" finds in a mere antimaterialism another void. Only by putting their talents to work in the defense of their country do they find true satisfaction. The discipline of military life does not destroy their individuality; it only completes it by enabling them to use their unique talents as part of something larger than themselves.

The Joes' main enemy is Cobra, a

BOOKS IN BRIEF—FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Pravda: Inside the Soviet News Machine by Angus Roxburgh, New York: George Braziller, Inc.; \$19.95. A solid antidote to sufferers of glasnostitis, this compact book provides an interesting history of the Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*. About half the book contains excerpts from *Pravda* over the last five years. These are a collection of boring lies, but so is the newspaper. The tales of the 10 years of Nikolai Bukharin's editorship in the 1920's is especially interesting as are the examples of doctored photos.

USSR Foreign Policies After Detente by Richard F. Staar, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution; \$13.95. This outstanding updated edition is highly factual and reviews all of the major determinants of USSR foreign policy. Staar includes ideology, government structure, propaganda, espionage, military strategy, and foreign trade, and he reviews regional policies and problems. The book has numerous tables of economic, trade, military, and personnel data, with a lengthy bibliography.

"ruthless terrorist organization determined to rule the world." It is a rootless evil identified with no particular country or ideology (though most of its leaders are obviously foreign). Its agents can spring up anywhere. There is a strong antidrug message present in that many of Cobra's schemes involve the use of mind-control chemicals to bend honest citizens to their will. One of Cobra's leaders is even called "Dr. Mindbender."

For those who object to imaginary evils when the U.S. already has enough real enemies, there is a Soviet commando group that the Joes occasionally battle called the "October Guard." The Joes and the Guard dislike each other but sometimes are forced to cooperate against Cobra. However, the Guard invariably double-crosses the Joes in the end. It is thus possible to see the origins of the Cold War in these three-sided conflicts.

Although Cobra is a private conspiracy up against an arm of the U.S. military, the Joes must always fight outnumbered and outgunned. This is the standard predicament of heroes. It wouldn't be a challenge otherwise. However, Cobra constantly cripples itself. Its leaders battle among themselves and will even sell each other out to the Joes to gain some political advantage within the Cobra hierarchy. Many are mercenaries fighting only for plunder and will cut and run at the first sign of a reverse. In contrast, the Joes are loyal to the flag and to each other. They are willing to die for their cause. Again, the lesson being taught is obvious. Patriotism defeats faction and self-interest. The children may learn this before the politicians do. Cobra is a better enemy for the acting out of this morality play than would be the October Guard or some other clearly recognized foreign or ideological foe. It enables the Joes to confront and defeat elements that plague our own political culture.

G.I. Joe portrays an idealized American response to national security threats. Even the commander's name, General "Hawk," is symbolic. The lyrics of the television theme song claim that "Wherever there's trouble, G.I. Joe is there" and that "He never gives up; he'll stay til the fight's won"—statements that have not been

true since the Vietnam War. Indeed, so pointed are the jabs that it is difficult not to believe in the existence of an active cell of counterrevolutionary elves in the workshop of Hasbro, Inc., the toy company that produces G.I. Joe. One episode of the cartoon series even featured a reporter claiming that there was no Cobra threat, Cobra being only an excuse to get more money allocated to the military. The reporter's research assistant turned out to be a Cobra agent.

Euripides believed that "Courage can be taught as a child is taught to speak." So can other values and the earlier in life the better. Earlier generations had Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers, Gary Cooper and John Wayne at the Saturday matinee to provide examples of heroes and lessons about law and order. But the Western has lost its appeal in this "high-tech" age. Yet, after a decade of self-flagellation and antiheroes in the 1970's, there is a need for "a real American hero" to lift the spirits of the young. G.I. Joe helps meet that need.

William R. Hawkins is the economics consultant to the U.S. Business and Industrial Council and a columnist for the USBIC Writer's Syndicate.

Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

Covering Dixie Like the Dew

Time for another round-up of Southern news you may not have seen. Let's start off slow, with this item from the *Chapel Hill (NC) Newspaper*, back in February.

Arnold D. Rollins of Rt. 5 Box 372, Chapel Hill, reported a hit-and-run accident on Columbia St. and Rosemary St. at 11:30.

According to police reports, a pedestrian ran into the corner of Rollins' tow truck. Rollins says he was heading north on Rosemary at about 20-25 mph when a boy jumped out of a car stopped at the intersection and ran into the fender of his

truck.

Rollins said that the victim did not stop, but spun around, fell, and then hopped away from the accident.

No damage or injuries was [sic] reported.

I told you we do things differently down here.

* * *

How about this tidbit, from the Mar-seilles of the South: The jury that acquitted Governor Edwards of Louisiana on fraud and racketeering charges stayed at the Avenue Plaza Hotel in New Orleans. When they checked out, according to the hotel's owner, they took with them 24 towels, valued at \$200.

* * *

Next door in Mississippi, during archery season (which runs for about a month before the start of gun season) even the use of crossbows is forbidden. But last year 4'3" Kenneth Hodge pointed out that the law has its, ah, drawbacks. Hodge's arms are too short to draw a 28-inch arrow. Now, Mississippi has seldom been on the cutting edge of equal-opportunity legislation, but state representative Will Green Poindexter responded to Hodge's complaint with a bill that would have allowed dwarfs to use crossbows. I don't know if it passed or not, but I think it's a great idea, and while they're at it they ought to ask them to wear little green suits.

* * *

And speaking of wildlife: the floods of 1986 in Jefferson County, Arkansas, were not without their silver lining. According to the *Arkansas Times*, one man whose home was submerged for a weekend strung a trotline across his front yard and caught more than three hundred fish.

* * *

The same journal reported that a filling station near Sheridan, when chided about a sign that read "Mechnic on Duty," changed it for one that said "Mechanick on Duty." When told by a passing busybody that was wrong, too, its proprietor replaced it with one that read: "Broke Cars Fixed."

* * *

A Mississippi correspondent sends a marvelous advertisement for South Central Bell. "KEEP UP A SOUTH-