



Sarum Soldiers set titled "Coming Through the Rye," inspired by the American Western artist Frederick Remington.

Wild West's Queen of Cow Towns

Toy Soldier Museum wrangler Jim Hillestad rounds up figures to illustrate a slice of life in Dodge City, where the convergence of buffalo, railways and longhorn cattle created an 1870s boomtown on the American frontier

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JAMES H. HILLESTAD

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway did the most to connect the Kansas "cow towns." It made Dodge City the major cow town on the American frontier in the 1870s.

Originally called Fort Dodge, it provided supplies, horses, livestock and shelter for troops on campaign to round up Indians who had left the reservations. The horse soldiers were led by such notables as U.S. Army Gens. Winfield Hancock and George Armstrong Custer.

SEEDS OF GROWTH

Dodge City grew and prospered due to three uncontrollable forces that inter-

sected there: buffalo, railroads and longhorn cattle.

It was estimated that as many as several million buffalo once blanketed the Great Plains. Men reported riding through a herd for more than 100 miles. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody boasted that he had once killed more than 4,000 buffalo in 18 months.

Many people believed that the creation of a transcontinental railroad was the linchpin which would enable the United States to fulfill its "manifest destiny," a phrase first used in 1845. Railways created flows of livestock and farm products to market that were measured in days instead of weeks.

The third element was longhorn cattle. By the end of the American Civil War, there was a pent-up demand for beef in the reunified country. Cowboys drove herds from Texas along the Great Western Cattle Trail, a branch of the Chisholm Trail, to the railhead in Dodge City in southwestern Kansas.

The railroad provided a faster way to transport cattle to market — which meant that more, healthier and fatter cattle survived the trip. Dodge City became known as "Queen of the Cow Towns."

Also, there was the lure of gold and silver in Colorado, Nevada and Cali-

FEATURE

Cowboy campfire on the Great Plains.



An indefatigable prospector as imagined by toy figure maker Patrick Willis.

fornia. This brought prospectors to Dodge City on their way westward.

A TOXIC MIX

It was inevitable that Dodge City would become a boomtown. For a variety of reasons, it attracted thieves, drunks, deserters and guerrillas trying to relive the looting of the ACW. Added to this mix were buffalo hunters and cowboys with pay in their pockets.

In 1878, the Ford County Globe newspaper estimated that of Dodge City's 700 residents, 47 were prostitutes. Between drinking, long hours, physical abuse and sexually transmitted diseases, few frontier women working in the "world's oldest profession" lived to see middle age.

During Dodge City's "golden decade" (1872-1882), some of the



Saturday night at the frontier town's jail.



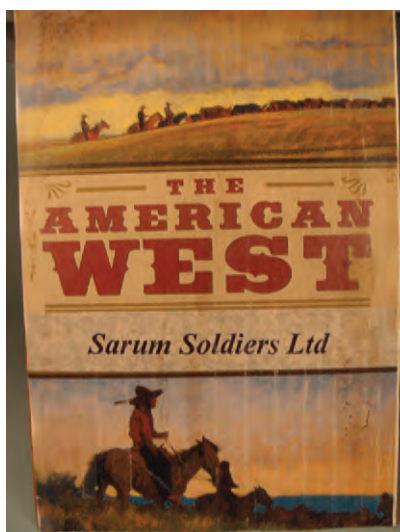
An irate customer witnesses a bank robbery.



Surprise! The town marshal interrupts a "private party."

RAILWAY TO HELL

The story is told of a despondent man riding on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railway. A curious conductor tapped the passenger's shoulder and asked where he was going. "To hell most likely," the man muttered. "That's two dollars, and get off at Dodge City," the conductor replied.



WHAT MAKES US COLLECT?

Patrick Willis, the creative architect behind Sarum Soldiers, shared the following in June 1996:

What makes us collect toy soldiers? What led Churchill, H.G. Wells and Forbes of the eponymous magazine to buy and collect toy soldiers?

What is the charm in the little tin men that makes sober businessmen, successful doctors, hardened lawyers and staid bankers become passionate collectors?

Perhaps we all have a basic desire to lead our armies in triumphant campaigns. Perhaps it's the pure nostalgia for lost glory and a world in which the good guy always wins.

Whatever the reason, whether we are young or old, we share the magic of the miniature world where ordered ranks stand arrayed in splendor; where battles rage but no one is hurt, and where the sun never sets on ancient kingdoms.



The lively Longhorn Saloon.

frontier's most infamous characters passed through Dodge — notably outlaws and brothers Jesse and Frank James.

All this combined to put Dodge City on the precipice of becoming a totally lawless town.

ENTER THE PEACEKEEPERS

There was no police force to call on when things got too far out of hand. Riding into this free-for-all was an assortment of individuals who would

soon become legendary for their roles in bringing law and order to the Plains. They included men like Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson and John Henry "Doc" Holliday.

To illustrate this article, I chose 54-mm metal figures in glossy paint produced in England by my good friend Patrick Willis, who formerly operated Sarum Soldiers. His creative and evocative figures capture the spirit of the American Wild West. ■



Gamblers play high-stakes poker.



Hoedown at the Longhorn Saloon.



Prospectors panning for gold find a nugget in a vignette created by Patrick Willis.



Silver mine by Sarum Soldiers.



ABOUT THE WRITER

James H. Hillestad is a military historian and proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum in Cresco, Pa., USA.