

# GENERALS ON THE DRAWING-ROOM FLOOR

**GULLIVER IN FLANDERS:** General Blotto (recumbent) sights one of his guns against a force which is threatening his right flank



the road. From his centre, another seventy-five rakes into Blitz's advanced force and reduces the men behind the gun to three, so that it is out of action. A nearby howitzer serves to decimate Blitz's force coming round on to the main road, and from his right flank Blotto brings into action another howitzer and two more field guns to drive Blitz back away from his point of advance on to the Flanders Plain. Then he quickly makes some fresh dispositions among his troops. Flitz is getting close to his left flank so he moves some cavalry across from the centre and brings some infantry up from his reserves, hidden in the hills. His right flank he leaves, for Blitz is still skulking behind his cover, several moves off the Meuse. From his centre a small force of cavalry is sufficient to attack Blitz's advanced gun position, establish its numerical superiority, and capture gun, crew, and all. After one move, Blotto may turn the captured gun against the attackers.

Liège, in the way of Blitz; opposed a suitably balanced force against Flitz; and from the heights in his centre enfiladed the enemy battalions and established a force of fast-moving cavalry which swung left and right to meet whichever enemy general menaced his key positions.

To be brief, the dash through Flanders failed miserably against a continually hot fire and occasional sallies by mechanised units. In the Ardennes the defenders were alive to the position, and opposed every move by Blitz, and in front of Paris itself Blotto dug in behind his guns and had Flitz reduced to half his men by the time he was up and ready to engage.

So Paris held the day, and we wondered afterwards, as all armchair generals wonder, if we could not have done better on the actual field of battle.

## A Serious Business

In case this seems presumptuous, it is as well to make it quite clear that "Little Wars" is no easy game of toy soldiers. There are fixed rules of movement and battle action, and the whole game is designed to correspond very closely to the real thing. (To meet modern conditions it has, of course, been considerably elaborated since H. G. Wells first evolved it way back in 1913).

Staff officers have been known to succumb to mere civilians in "Little Wars," and it takes little imagination to see from it that the mistakes which lose a few lead men and a paper maché hill or two, in real battle can lose army corps and whole nations.

The rules provide that each side moves in turn. In our game, for example, Blotto moved first, having won the toss. His cavalry he moved along roads, where he was allowed to take them three feet at a time, and with them went his guns, which otherwise would have had to wait for the infantry and travel only 18 inches at a time. Early in the game, therefore, he had his guns in place. Flitz and Blitz, on the other hand, failed

to realise the importance of early moves, and did not select the quickest means of advance. Both kept many men on open country, where cavalry can only move two feet at a time, and where infantry move only one foot. The straight direct roads they did not use, feeling that insufficient cover was offering; but they should have dashed up these before Blotto had his guns emplaced. Instead they followed the winding side roads, and were not ready to débouch at the Flanders plain, in the Ardennes, or through the Lorraine Gateway, before all these points were adequately defended.

The guns travel, as stated, as fast as the unit to which they are attached, and the tanks may go as far as they can with their springs fully wound up, except that they cannot be sent off at any time unless there are four men with them. In each move, guns can be fired or moved (not both), and to be either fired or moved they must have four men within six inches of them. Tanks can cross rivers, but the rest of the army must have pontoon bridges, whose movements are regulated as for cavalry.

## Heat of Battle

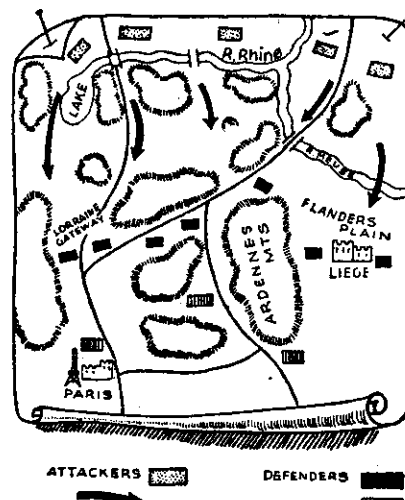
In the heat of battle there is a frantic scrambling over the countryside. Take the case of one move on the part of the attackers. They go into action simultaneously, opening fire with their guns before they move their men. Flitz finds his ammunition will not fit one of his field guns and loses a valuable half minute remedying the matter. Blitz jams his howitzer and has to call on the ordnance officer to remedy the fault. In their haste they have become panicky and their fire is not accurate when they finally do get all their artillery under way. Blotto loses half a dozen men to a well-placed howitzer shell, but only two or three to the lighter fire of the naval guns (mounted for work in the field).

The barrage over, Flitz moves 20 cavalymen another three feet along the

windy road near Lake Constance, follows them with the slower moving force of 30 foot, and crosses the Rhine with a small force of cavalry and some 40 infantry. His tank he brings up a little further, and one gun which he has not fired he moves to a better position.

Meanwhile Blitz has been fussing round looking for an opportunity to swing into action across the Flanders Plain, and into the Ardennes he rushes a pitifully small force of cavalry with a gun.

Blotto's turn comes. He is allowed a minute to study the field and have his ammunition ready, and then he goes into action. On the Paris front he has a 'seventy-five and a howitzer. The howitzer gets two shots home in Flitz's men in the open valley and scatters them with much slaughter. His 'seventy-five picks off one or two cavalry whose heads are showing above the bank of



Sketch plan of the "Battle for Paris," secured from the enemy by extreme guile. (Note: The geography is a trifle mixed—on purpose)

## "Positional" Play

And so it goes on. Half the time the players are crouched into the most peculiar positions. At one stage someone finds a gun too close to a wall, and has to stand up on his elbows with his feet scratching the wall-paper and his neck almost twisted off his shoulders. He may get cramp and fierce pains may run through his joints, but he does not give in until he has fired the gun. All the players get stiff knees sooner or later, and the next day they totter to work wondering how charwomen ever manage.

After one game I now feel competent to match myself against Gort himself. Blotto, the more experienced owner of all the troops and terrain, doubtless has a feeling of omnipotence, having carried through successful campaigns in China, Spain and Abyssinia, as well as France. His defence of Madrid is recalled as an epic in the use of rough country. We have visions of challenging the entire mess at Trentham or Burnham, or Trentham and Burnham, but it would not be fair to the inexperienced Army men, who have never seen the fierce actions on the drawing-room floor.

Fun as the game may be, there is a serious side to it as well. It is far from being mere child's play. When there is a lull in the battle and you have time to think, it is impossible not to realise the significance of every move and mistake had they been made in terms of real battalions. Trapped, one general advances in desperation. Hot artillery fire meets him, thins his ranks, and behind it come the tanks and cavalry to administer the coup. The general is lost, his guns are lost, his men lie dead upon the field. Whoof! Like that.

A possible peace-time charge that such a game encourages a too belligerent spirit, is untenable. "Little Wars" brings home the significance of big wars altogether too realistically for that. As a game it is intensely interesting. As a parable it is realistically significant.