

# A veteran "general"

**A** STALWART Australian Imperial Force and Boer War veteran now living in Brisbane (Queensland) commands Australia's biggest and best equipped, though most unorthodox, army.

He is Major Theo Svensen, 70, formerly of the 15th Battalion, 1st AIF. Every officer, "other rank" horse and weapon in his unusual force is made from paper.

He has been making and collecting his force since he was a 9-year-old boy in his native Norway. He came to Australia in 1890.

His main hobby, over the past few years, has been deploying his forces on a table-top battlefield where the famous world battles, including some in which he has himself taken part, are fought over again.

An architectural draughtsman by profession, Svensen is a methodical, painstaking recorder.

At his headquarters in Buranda—a near-Brisbane suburb—Svensen keeps voluminous records in which the history of every one of his paper soldiers is written down.

An avid reader of world happenings, Svensen has faithfully copied the uniforms of a dozen 19th century regiments or more.

French Zouaves of 1814 take the field on his tabletop battlefield alongside such crack British regiments as the British Lancers of 1890, 6th Dragoons (1899), the Scottish Royal Black Watch, the Gordon and Seaforth Highlanders and the Polish Lancers of 1812.

The ramrod backed ex-major disclaims any originality in pursuing his unusual hobby.

Svensen says the Societe des Collectionneurs de Soldats of Paris has hundreds of members. But, these, he is careful to add, are collectors of leaden soldiers. He claims to be the only man in the world to have devoted his attention to the paper soldier.

In Britain a similar society has many members, chiefly retired army officers reconstructing past glories.

## Boyhood hobby

Svensen says his collection of 750 "troops" wedged in wooden bases, is a modest one compared with that of M. Gustav de Ridden of Sweden, who has more than 800,000, or that of Frenchman M. Jean Bretonnier, who has a collection of 100,000 in Paris.

The late H. G. Wells was also an ardent collector of model soldiery and a Hollywood film director—name unknown—has 20,000.

Svensen, who is a talented water-colorist, has exhibited his work in Brisbane. He has made hundreds of detailed drawings of the uniforms of his various regiments. The set of a cap, the uniform design and decorations of a dozen nations have had to be checked before he could create his troops of the line.

Having mastered the uniform details Major Svensen has then created a character for his records, who he

**Boer War and World War Digger fights battles over again with paper battalions.**

By E. F. GAY



A perfectionist the major insists on authentic scenery. He brought this old castle from Norway.

has called in his book, "Sergeant-major Gurov", of the Russian Grenadier Guards or "Private, Omar" of the 1st Regiment of French Zouaves.

Each of Major Svensen's "soldiers" is 1½ in high and drawn in full color on one side only. On the other side is his regimental number which links up with identity records kept by Svensen for more than 60 years.

Svensen began his soldier-collecting as a boy of nine in his native Trondheim, Norway, where he still has a valiant aunt who fought in the underground movement during World War II and was decorated by King Haakon with the Order of St. Olaf (1st class).

From the time when he was a short-pants lad, to today when he is a grey-headed, wise veteran of 70, Svensen has found the time between three wars, his art, stamp-collecting and bird fancying to build up his army of dream individuals.

His hobby is shared by his wife and, when they were younger, his two boys—not forgetting his old "cobbers" of the Boer War and Gallipoli campaigns.

For years, when visitors called at the Svensen home it was a case of all down on the floor to fight the Battle of The Marne or some other famous battle all over again.

Of his original collection of paper soldiers—made in Norway as a boy

—32 infantry and 22 cavalry have survived. These veterans now are 62 years old.

"In my native land, all of us boys collected soldiers and met in one or another's homes to fight tabletop battles. Each live commanding officer was equipped with a catapult and a wooden "shell". The troops were drawn up shoulder to shoulder and when the firing began the casualties were enormous, but it was a stimulating, exciting game," Svensen recalls.

## Exciting game

When Svensen came to Australia in 1890 he introduced the game here and all his civilian life has been showing others how to play at tabletop war.

In earlier battles he used a specially-contrived cotton-reel which served as a barrel for the elastically-projected "shell". Now, he and his wife use model naval guns, the elevation of which can be adjusted to what proves to be a devastating trajectory on a packed tabletop battle field.

Major Svensen's two sons have long since passed their boyhood enthusiasm for the game, but Svensen still gets an old campaigner's kick out of reconstructing a battle scene straight from the history books and demonstrating how lost causes could have been won and vice versa.

The late H. G. Wells, who was engrossed in this hobby, published an article in 1913 entitled Little Wars. This laid down certain rules for the annihilation of leaden troops.

## STRANGE CURE

THESE are an extraordinary number of so-called "cures" for warts, and various superstitious beliefs as to how they occur. Even modern medical men do not fully understand their cause. All sorts of preposterous methods of treating warts crop up in historical records, and even Pliny in his Natural History nearly 2000 years ago suggested: "Lie on your back along a boundary line on the 20th day of the month, extend the hands over the head, and with whatever thing you grasp when so doing rub the warts, and they will soon disappear." Modern physicians and chemists find that certain acids and electrical currents are more efficacious!