

# Children’s War Games and Toys in Hungary, 1914–1918

Boldizsár Vörös

Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Tóth Kálmán utca 4, 1097 Budapest, Hungary; [voros.boldizsar@abtk.hu](mailto:voros.boldizsar@abtk.hu)

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**Abstract.** Children’s games are accurate reflections of a community’s culture with its values, norms and expectations. The Hungarian games of the World War I period were also such expressions both in regard to children’s play activities (which they were able to pursue without toys, with toys they made themselves, or with those produced by official manufacturers) and the products of toy manufacturing companies. In this study, numerous games (for example, group battles, board games produced by manufacturers and put into commercial circulation, etc.) are discussed and analysed. At the same time, the various views on games by pedagogical experts and contributors to children’s magazines published at the time are also discussed. My research has revealed that not only do these games demonstrate some peculiarities of the World War I (for example, the war’s impact upon the most diverse areas of life) but that the War itself brought into prominence certain features of such games and carried into effect their latent possibilities (for example, war games becoming especially brutal). Beyond the scope of research on games and toys, on a more general note this study shows that cultural phenomena can react to radical historical changes.

**Keywords:** World War I, Hungary, children, games, toys, education

“Adults think that a toy is something that is smaller than its counterpart in reality, of cheaper material and more perishable. However, toys are actually symbols of reality. A cane with a piece of string tied to it is the symbol of a gun because it can be hoisted onto the shoulder,” teacher and arts writer Pál Nádain wrote in his work of 1911 *Könyv a gyermekről* [Book about Children].<sup>1</sup> Over eight decades later, anthropologist Garry E. Chick appraised games in a similar way: “Games are functionally related to and reflect the values of the cultures of which they are a part. As such, they are neither trivial nor random in design or distribution.”<sup>2</sup>

On the subject of children’s games, and war games in particular, László Nógrády, a teacher and psychologist, wrote in his 1913 book *A gyermek és a játék* [Children and Play]:

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1 Nádain, *Könyv a gyermekről*, Vol. 1, 36. About Pál Nádain, see for example: “Nádain, Paul,” 292.

2 Chick, “Games,” 515.

“Playing at soldiers has always been a popular game among children and it remains so. Regardless of all the anti-military movements, behaving in a masculine way is an instinct boys are born with. This instinct comes alive when a child sees a soldier in little wood shavings and when in the dream of its dreams the child is able to hold an army of lead soldiers and then enters the field to pursue the Russo–Japanese war, only to quickly enter the fray of the Turkish–Balkan War [...] children’s games faithfully follow those of adults. There can be no modern army of lead soldiers without warships and aircraft.”<sup>3</sup>

According to this exposition, at the beginning of the twentieth century, children’s war games and toys were modelled on the prevailing global historical situation. This was reflected in the choice of participants in actual war conflicts and the integration of the latest products of military engineering into toys and games. Yet, at this time it was not only children or toy manufacturers that created and proliferated toys of war but pedagogical professionals as well. In his book entitled *100 gyermek-játék* [100 Games for Children], Jakab Barna, a gymnastics teacher, recommended to boys a game called *Playing at Soldiers*.

“We know how much already six-to-eight-year-old children like to pretend to be soldiers. So why isn’t this made into a game at school? And in this case, the teacher would take on the leadership role. This would make it easy to train children in a few simple military drills too. Furthermore, this game can be linked to sloyd teaching, as for the game, children need to make their own little shakos, swords, and flags. Exercises should be practised with these [hand-made objects], and marching should be accompanied by singing. The cleverer children can be promoted to non-commissioned officers and officers in some kind of small ceremony. From grade three onwards, this playful framework can be replaced by more discipline. Therefore, marching should often take place to the accompaniment of a song, drums, or trumpets.”<sup>4</sup>

This text clearly shows that Barna recommended the game to his colleagues as a kind of early preparation for the boys’ military training.

During the period of the World War I, Hungarian children’s games were linked to these phenomena, both in regard to children’s play activities (which they were able to pursue without toys, with toys they made themselves, or with ones produced by official manufacturers) and the products of toy manufacturing companies.

3 Nógrády, *A gyermek és a játék*, 286, for more on László Nógrády, see for example: “Nógrády, Ladislaus,” 320–21. For more on Hungarian children’s toys at the turn of the Nineteenth–Twentieth centuries, see for example: Tészabó, “1904 Toy Competition,” 93–101.

4 Barna, ed., *100 gyermekjáték*, 134. The date of the foreword: June 1906. See: 4.

It transpires from literary works dealing with foreign children's games at the time of the World War I that there were similar phenomena inside and outside Hungary. Thus, for example, according to Mike Brown, in war games played in England "[t]he problem was that nobody wanted to play the Germans,"<sup>5</sup> while authors writing about games in Hungary noted that children were averse to taking on the role of the Russian enemy.<sup>6</sup> Brown also states that in England "[w]ar-related toys proved most popular in 1914, but by 1917 they were losing favour as war-weariness and disillusionment spread throughout the civilian population."<sup>7</sup> We read of a similar trend in Hungarian accounts from the end of 1916 and in 1917.<sup>8</sup> In his review of children's games during the years of the World War I, the American Andrew Donson notes that "[a]s the war continued, adults remarked that the war play became rougher and often downright violent."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, in the spring of 1915, a Hungarian article warned of the danger that war games of children were becoming rougher.<sup>10</sup> However, further research is required to establish if there were 'executions' in the games in Hungary, or if there were 'burials' related to the high casualty rates among soldiers, in the same way as there were, according to Rebecca Heinemann, in Germany.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as Donson shows, "[g]ames like cops and robbers and cowboys and Indians transformed overnight into battles of France or Great Britain against Germany and other contests."<sup>12</sup> In studying developments in Hungary, we should note László Nógrády's 1913 observations that the military conflicts of the given period (the Russo–Japanese and Turkish–Balkan wars) also appear in children's clashes.<sup>13</sup> It transpires from a diary and the contemporary press, sources that foreign researchers also use when studying the war games of 1914–1918,<sup>14</sup> that children in Hungary played the Greco–Turkish War in 1897, the Boer–English War in 1900, and the Russo–Japanese War in 1904. This series continued with the clashes between "Hungarians" and "Russians" during the World War I. Indeed, some Hungarian recollections inform us that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries young people played out the historical conflicts from earlier centuries that they had learned about at school, such as the ancient

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5 Brown, *Children*, 27.

6 About this element of the games, see notes 22 and 23 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

7 Brown, *Children*, 28.

8 For details, see notes 39 and 40 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

9 Donson, "Children," 6.

10 For further details, see note 44 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

11 Heinemann, "Kinder," 352.

12 Donson, "Children," 6.

13 For further details, see note 3 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

14 Ganaway, *Toys*, 240–42; Donson, *Youth*, 170–75, 291–92; Donson, "Children," 6; Zollinger, "Spiele," 245–46, 252–56.

Peloponnesian War between Athenians and Spartans, and the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage.

Descriptions of these pre-1914 war games reflect fairly balanced power relations between the warring sides, making genuine struggles possible.<sup>15</sup> Besides the overviews of children's games available from the period of World War I, written by foreign authors,<sup>16</sup> an examination and detailed analysis of certain games seems worth making<sup>17</sup> to explore the phenomena of war that are manifest in them. This study undertakes just that in the case for both team games and the products of toy companies. Contemporary texts published specifically by professionals dealing with children, such as pedagogical writers and the staff of newspapers for young people in 1914–1918, are particularly useful for this kind of research.

Before a more detailed description and analysis, it is necessary to point out that at that time children and adults had different definitions of what constituted a game. As a secondary school teacher from Esztergom describes activities in 1915, "The agile head of grade two divided pupils into groups, who carried out all kinds of free exercises, but chiefly and with the greatest enthusiasm military close order drills, initially under his direction, and later under that of appointed group leaders." When studying the outcomes of a survey, it struck the teacher that when the boys had to answer the question "Do you play at being soldiers?" in the first grade, 18 out of 30 answered 'no', while 10 out of 40 in grade two gave the same reply, meaning that 'no' was given as an answer by 28 out of 70 boys, representing over one third, and this included pupils who 'exercised' the most enthusiastically. In relation to all of this, the teacher expressed the following opinion: "The only way I can explain this strange phenomenon is to say that children regard these soldierly exercises, marches, »assaults« and others as a serious thing and they do not in fact »play« at being soldiers since real soldiers do it in exactly the same way as them."<sup>18</sup> In the rest of my study, I will only discuss activities and tools that adults of the period regarded as children's games or toys.

The reports made by educational institutions in Budapest for the 1914–1915 academic year demonstrate that both kindergarten and school age children played war games. According to a report by a nursery school:

"On one occasion we witnessed the following: the boys divided into two camps consisting of a group of Hungarians and one of Russians. The

15 Vörös, "»Athéniek« és »spártaiak«,” 319–24. In contrast with these, see notes 19 and 22 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

16 See for example: Donson, "Children," 6; Levsen, "War Toys," 1–2; Zollinger, "Spiele," 231–59.

17 See for example to this: Ganaway, *Toys*, 237–39.

18 Obermüller, "Egy vidéki iskola," 261, 262.

Hungarians attacked and fired away, and some of the Russians fell on the ground, while the others began to run away. They were then pursued by the Hungarians. Next, stretcher bearers gathered together the fallen; treating them as wounded, they carried them off and laid them on little benches. Then the doctor came to examine them. The light casualties were entrusted to the care of nurses, while the seriously wounded were taken to hospital, and the little girls stroked the patients, giving them drinks, laying them down, and dressing their wounds with the most amazing tenderness.”<sup>19</sup>

The report of another school reads as follows:

“The school pupils of various ages (7–11 years) make weapons or have them made from wood and, copying the various formations executed by the soldiers at the nearby military parade ground, carry out formal skirmishes completely similarly to soldiers. Equipped with weapons and small spades, they form into extended order either dividing into two opposing groups, or just as if they were facing an imagined enemy. They dig ditches and take cover, hiding well. In even stretches of 20–30 steps at a time they come closer and closer to one another, all the while digging new ditches with the greatest skill and speed. Reaching the goal sometimes takes two or three hours, but ignoring their exhaustion they carry out their work with continuous exertion. Coming close to one another or charging right up to their imagined enemy, they deal out death through a symbolic blow or take one another prisoner. They usually select the commanders in the school and, there as well, organise themselves into groups.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition to serving as a basis for *bringing up to date* already existing types of games, i.e., the struggle between groups, the selection of participants in the conflict (Hungarians vs. Russians), and methods applied in the engagement (digging ditches), the World War I may have *radically changed* the way in which games

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19 *A Budapest-székesfővárosi községi iskolák évkönyve*, 249. Date of Ferenc Déri’s introduction: 16 June 1915, see: 8. It is remarkable that, according to this description, the “Russians” do not even defend themselves but rather “fall” or “flee”—the rules of this game presumably set that the “Russians” must “suffer defeat”. It was a difference from the pre-1914 war games (about these, see note 15 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it) because a real struggle did not happen in this case. For more about this element of the game, see note 22 of this study and the main body of the text linked to it.

20 *A Budapest-székesfővárosi községi iskolák évkönyve*, 248. In the games described here, the fictitious enemy was presumably necessary because in the given case neither of the groups of children wanted to take on the role of the “enemy.” For more about this element of the game, see notes 22 and 23 of this study and the main body of the text linked to it.

already known at the beginning of the twentieth century and directed by a teacher according to set rules were played. According to a teacher's account dated to May 1915, a game called *Who is Stronger?*<sup>21</sup> published in Jakab Barna's book, was played by elementary school pupils as follows:

“With a line drawn across the middle of the room I [i.e., the teacher] arranged them seeing who could pull another across to their side. Of course, some would be Hungarians, and the others Russians. However, the group declared that they *would not* be Russians. Even though I explained that they would later exchange roles, they insisted that they would not be the Russians. When using my authority as their teacher I ordered them that they should indeed be the Russians, and every one of them who played *a Russian let himself be pulled across the line just so that the Hungarians would win.*”<sup>22</sup>

However, not only the types of games originating from before World War I were adapted to reality or modified when they were played out. Some games appeared modelled on the current historical-political events, and instructions were provided to children by those who devised the games. In a compilation entitled *Gyermekjátékok* [Children's Games], published in the 9th of January 1916 issue of the *Jó Pajtás* [Good Pal] children's magazine, a game referred to as *Playing at Soldiers* is explained. This is how it is played:

“The children choose a captain, who is given a shako and a sword.  
The captain goes over to one of the children and says:  
»Come for a soldier, pal.«  
»Not I for they'll butcher me.«  
»Of course, they won't, of course they won't,  
they do nought but throw dumplings at us.«  
»If they throw dumplings,  
then I'll go for a soldier.  
Instead of a sword I'll take a fork,  
and with that I'll eat dumplings.«  
*Captain:* »Salute! Line up!«

21 “Two rows stand opposite each other. Every boy has his own partner. The partners standing opposite each other clasp hands on the word »hold«, »one« or another code word. Upon the game leader giving the command »pull«, each boy tries to pull his partner from their position.” Barna, ed., *100 gyermekjáték*, 127–28.

22 Urhegyi, “Egy kis beszámoló,” 4. Before the case description, the author introduces this type of game in the following way: “Who is stronger? is the name of the game.”

The child then stands behind the captain, and the captain goes up to every child until they are all conscripted. Naturally, if there are enough shakos and swords, every enlisted soldier is given one of each.

The captain now gives the command:

»Attention! Fall in!«

The captain then appoints a lieutenant, a corporal, a drummer, and so forth. He then stands before the group and gives the command:

»Attention! We're off to the Straits of Uzhok against the Russkies.«

However, there are not always Russkies as the children do not like playing them. At such times, benches and chairs are appointed as Russkies, and the captain gives the loud command:

»Attention! Commence!«

»Attention! Fire!«

At this point, they would keep shooting at the Russkies and finally break out into a victory song”.

The two verses of the song complete the description of the game.<sup>23</sup>

It is noteworthy that in essence this “playing at soldiers” is a game where the children play out an entire war, as it contains the elements of recruitment, training, the organisation of the army, the battle, and a victorious peace. In addition to the depiction of current historical-political episodes (battles against Russian units, hopes for peace at the beginning of 1916), several other elements can be traced back to earlier origins: the details of Jakab Barna’s *Playing at Soldiers* game (the descriptions of both games have the same title, both include the elements of marching, the distribution of titles, the drills, the use of the tools of battle and the singing),<sup>24</sup> as well as the 1910s version<sup>25</sup> of the nineteenth-century recruitment song starting with the line “Come for a soldier, pal.”<sup>26</sup> The makers of the 1916 “playing at soldiers” utilised the experience of teachers relating to the war—i.e., the children did not want to play “Russkies”<sup>27</sup>—and thus the furniture at hand replaced them in the role of the enemy. Some peculiar two-way feedback thus emerged between wartime propaganda and children’s games: anti-Russian propaganda proved effectual among young people in the games they played, while the experience gained from their games was used in the new, propagandist *Playing at Soldiers* game of 1916 aimed at ensuring that the propaganda elements of the time (enthusiasm for war, hostility to Russians, and hopes for a victorious peace) would sink into the minds of the target users.

23 “Gyermekjátékok,” 30.

24 For more details, see note 4 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

25 “Mit mond a magyar nép?” 813.

26 Kálmány and Dégh, eds, *Történeti énekek*, 280–81.

27 For more details, see note 22 of this study and the main body of the text connected to it.

The following description of a children's game was also published in the 30 January 1916 issue of *Jó Pajtás*:

“Several children stand in a circle, and one in the middle to put the questions.

Whoever the child points at must answer the question.

»What do Italians like?«

*Answer:* Macaroni.

»What do Russians like?« (Vodka.)

»What do Serbs like?« (Meat and rice.)

»What do the French like?« (The Germans, but not very much.)

»What would the English like to have?« (The Dardanelles.)

»What would the whole world like to have?«

*Everybody replies:* Peace!”

Whoever gives the wrong answer or does not give an answer to the last question has to forfeit something and at the end redeem the forfeit in a specific way.”<sup>28</sup>

Similarly to *Playing at Soldiers*, this game is also linked to the prevailing historical situation through its allusion to England's aspirations and the desire for peace characteristic of the period. In the series of questions about the enemies of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, the game introduces the Italians, the Russians, and the Serbs with only one type of food or drink<sup>29</sup> each (and by doing this, throws in the stereotypes connected to them so that they take root in the players' minds). Gradually progressing from definite to more abstract concepts, they describe the French by naming their enemy, and the English by specifying one of their war objectives. At the same time, in addition to this progression, we can observe another similar method in this game: while only one participant must answer each of questions 1–5 relating to the various nations, all the players are expected to give the same answer to the last question about the whole world. This solution was aimed at highlighting the significance of peace, while demonstrating that among children's games with war as their theme, we find one taking a pacifist approach.

The effect of the World War I can also be observed in toy manufacturing and distribution. For example, the business brochure published at the time by the Késmárky and Illés shop advertised eleven objects: of these eight were connected in some way with war (e.g. battleship with clockwork, shotgun with a rubber end, field gun, shako, trench cap) (Figure 1).<sup>30</sup> However, in the 27 December 1914 issue of *Az*

28 “Játék,” 76. I was unable to find information about the method in which the forfeit was redeemed.

29 The Hungarian description of the game contains the wrong version of the word “vodka;” for more details, see: “Vodka,” 929.

30 For the brochure, see: OSzK, PKt, Any, 1916/30. no inv. nr.



*Én Ujságom* [My Magazine] children's magazine, we read the following advertisement: "an ingenious war board game has come out to entertain youth. The title of the game is 'DUM DUM' and its basis is a map of Europe on which all of the belligerents have a role. The aim of the game is to occupy the enemies' capital cities. The small-scale version of the game represents the eastern front and the large-scale version the entire World War. Both sizes come in two editions, costing 1, 1.50, 3 and 5 crowns."<sup>31</sup> The different quality editions of the game clearly demonstrate that their makers did their utmost to take into consideration the market opportunities and wanted their products to reach people of diverse financial means.

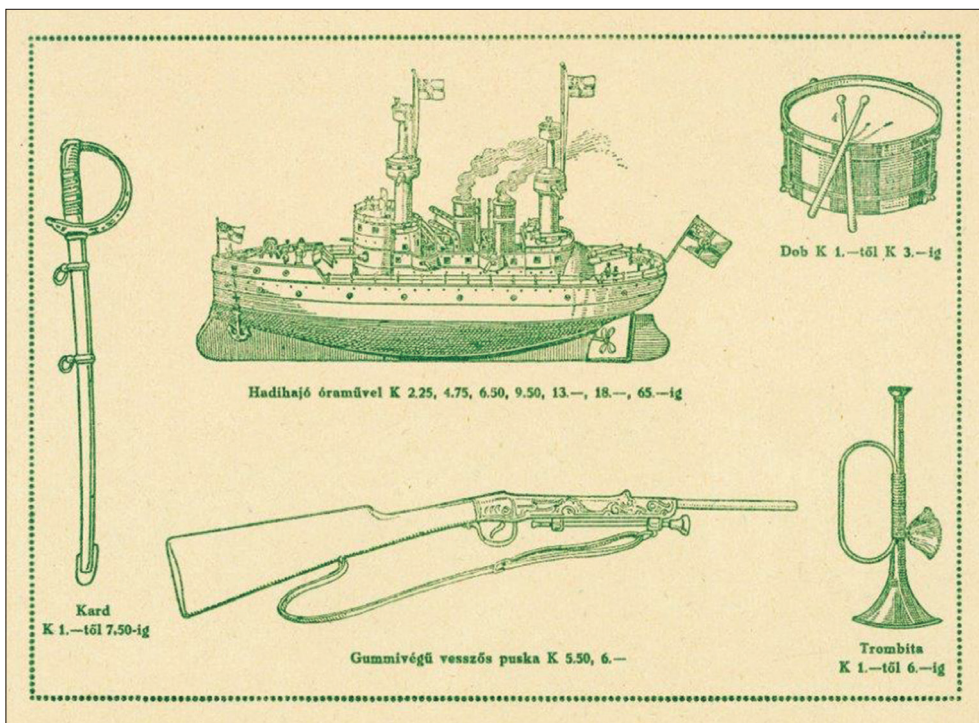


Figure 1 Késmárky és Illés brochure

Source: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Plakát- és Kisnyomtatványtár [National Széchényi Library, Collection of Small Prints]

In the large-scale version of *DUM DUM*, according to the text on the inside of the top of the box containing the board with a map depicting a global battle field, the figures representing the divisions necessary for the conflict, and the little dices (Figure 2), the game is a "Mock battle meant for patriotic youth and the future soldiers of the motherland." Written in the same place was "The manifesto of the oldest member of the company" in which, among other things, we read the following:

31 "Új háborús társasjáték," 19.

“Our loved ones will return from a victorious war, and we will be able to proudly tell them that we know the entire battlefield soaked with precious Hungarian blood! [...] We have also fought! We have also been victorious!” Next to this text, also on the inside of the top of the box, are the rules for *DUM DUM*, according to which there could be two or more players, each representing nations (Hungary, Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, Russia, England, Serbia, Montenegro). The sides are allocated by drawing



**Figure 2** *DUM DUM* board game with figures and dices  
**Source:** Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, Plakát- és Kinyomtatványtár, I. Világháborús Gyűjtemény [National Széchényi Library, Collection of Small Prints, World War I Collection] (Photographer: Zoltán Bakos)

lots, which shows that the makers of the product were probably aware that children were not happy to take on the role of Hungary's enemies,<sup>32</sup> but since without enemies the game could not be played, they left the choice to chance. The players were to form two alliances whose members could help each other by supplying soldiers, money and by passing on the right to throw the dice. Each of the allies receives 18 divisions, i.e., 18 small figures, which they use to try to break into the enemies' capitals, advancing along designated routes on the board. The players throw the dice and make as many moves as the dice shows, while each of the routes is marked by various signs alluding to various military events (battles, bombing from aeroplanes, running into a mine, etc.) that may cause losses to the warring sides. The game comes to an end when one of the allies has no more movable divisions; the winning ally is the one that occupies the enemy capitals with more divisions. The loser pays the number of the victorious divisions with toy money.

Examining the battle conditions applicable to the players in this game, we see that they are fairly balanced: for example, nine roads lead from the capital of the Central Powers to the capitals of the enemy, from which 8.5 roads lead to those of the Central Powers; the number of stations to pass through is 157 on the nine routes and 149 on the 8.5 routes; the sign “Division destroyed by bombing from aeroplanes”—which means that the player who lands on this is out of the game—can be found eight times on the routes of the Central Powers, and ten times on those of their enemies. The sign meaning “Ran into a mine”—which also means any player who reaches it

32 For more details, see notes 22 and 23 of this study, and the main body of the text connected to it.

is out of the game—can be seen three times on each side’s routes.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the rules and conditions of this game made it possible for the enemies of the Central Powers to attain victory, this being indispensable for a truly competitive struggle between the two sides to develop, i.e., for *DUM DUM* to be playable as a board game. However, this was in stark contrast with those parts of the manifesto that clearly predicted victory for the Central Powers; written on the top of the box, the lines addressed to young players encouraged them to identify with the aspirations of the World War I. *DUM DUM*, therefore, clearly illustrates the clash between the interests of war propaganda and the toy manufacturing business: while the former’s objective was to predict victory for the Central Powers, the latter was interested in devising a product that made true competition possible, since businessmen clearly did not regard a one-sided board game as marketable.

The June–November 1916 issues of the illustrated *Tolnai Világlapja* [Tolnai’s World Magazine] weekly magazine introduced a war game both for children and adults, and advertised a free colour supplement of one, two, or four pages in length every week that would present pictures of the most important battlefields that readers could set up as a game, thus “providing entertainment for six-year-old children and old people alike.” The publishers also made the promise that “those who can collect all the parts and assemble this war game will have a valuable and pleasant memento for decades to come.”<sup>34</sup> According to a description published later, the war game consisted of two parts: the battlefield where the war could be played out and a series of movable figures (soldiers, cannons, the Red Cross, etc.), that had their allocated places on the battlefield. The text claimed the following: “this entertaining game that at the same time will educate you can be played as often as you wish.”<sup>35</sup> In the multi-functional war game (serving as a memento, entertainment, and education), the figures that could be stood up on the battlefield against colour backgrounds represented the siege of Belgrade, then the front at Gorizia (Figure 3), followed by the front in South Tyrol,<sup>36</sup> and at the end of 1916 the continuation of the game was also advertised.<sup>37</sup> The editor’s note published in the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1916 issue of *Tolnai Világlapja* reported a huge success of the game, mentioning that it

33 See: *DUM DUM*, manufactured by KATÓ-KISZL [István Kizlingstein], Budapest, 1914, see: OSzK, PKt, IVGy, no inv. nr. The box also contains the German version of the Hungarian manifesto quoted in this study, although somewhat deviating from it, and the rules in German. The toy money was not included in the box. I was unable to find additional copies of *DUM DUM*, nor did I find information on its reception or its popularity.

34 “Hadijáték,” 15.

35 “Tolnai hadijátéka,” 15.

36 See the June–November 1916 issues of *Tolnai Világlapja*, with its advertisements of a different version of the game.

37 “Fontos tájékoztatás,” 17. I was unable to find details of the war game mentioned here.

was played not by children but by “grown-ups.”<sup>38</sup>

Some months later, in the middle of December 1916, an article in the *Pesti Napló* [Pest Gazette] daily reported that “the noise of war has now died down in children’s rooms. Children have become bored with playing at soldiers. They have learned to dread it.” The editor quoted the manager of a large toy shop who said that “[i]n the first two years of the war, a great many war games and toys were sold. [...]. For a long time, war games were very popular but this Christmas it seems that much of the stocks will remain in the shops. Very few war games and toys are being sold and children are returning to games of peace.”<sup>39</sup> The protracted conflict at the front and the effects of the deteriorating situation on the

hinterland undoubtedly contributed to war games losing their former popularity, as we read in a report published in the 1916–1917 academic year by the state elementary school for boys and girls in Karánsebes (now: Caransebeș, Romania): “However, their state of mind [i.e. that of the children] has been debilitated by the long war, they are generally depressed and they play fewer war games. This is because in most cases it is not only a brother but also the father who is away from the family for months; many have died as heroes or are languishing in prisoner-of-war camps on foreign soil, and



Figure 3 A görzi front I [The front at Gorizia I.]. Detail from the war game in Tolnai Világlapja

Source: Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum, Múzeumi Könyvgyűjtemény [Institute and Museum of Military History, Museum Collection of Books]

38 “Szerkesztői üzenetek,” 33.

39 -olt-, “A gyermekszoba békét kötött,” 5. I was unable to establish the author’s identity.

making ends meet is hard for their mothers.”<sup>40</sup> Naturally, over the following months as well, children played war games.<sup>41</sup>

Educators and writers for children’s magazines proposed various opinions in regard to children’s war games. In a letter of September 1914, the editor of *Az Én Ujságom* took the following position against “playing at soldiers”: “That you [the writer of the letter sent to the periodical and his peers] all play at soldiers is something I can imagine. But I would like to suggest to you: playing should be replaced by studying. Work has begun everywhere. If you do this with the same enthusiasm as you play at soldiers, then you will become a real soldier.”<sup>42</sup> Clearly with the intention of putting this approach into practise and supplanting “playing at soldiers,” between 1914 and 1918 several literary works in the columns of the periodical’s volumes depicted children’s war-like activities with irony, emphasising their flippant nature.<sup>43</sup> The writer of the editorial in the 11 March 1915 issue of *Néptanítók Lapja* [School Teachers’ Journal], the official organ of public education, warns of the looming danger posed by the increasing violence manifested in playing war games. “Youth, as we know, are by nature selfish and especially predisposed to coarseness and cruelty without wanting or being able to account for this and its incorrect nature.” He argues that representatives of this age group are susceptible to the effects of events in the war and that “if we do not intervene in good time with well-intentioned warnings or strict cautioning, it could result in damaging repercussions or indeed serious accidents [...]. We know of cases when children from decent middle-class families have been playing ‘Petar’ and ‘the Russki tsar’ and the chair was pulled from under one of the Petars in such a way that he fell to the ground and broke a leg, while the others gave the tsar a sound thrashing to the point where, alerted by the sound of wailing, panic-stricken parents rushed onto the scene of the drama.” In his article, the writer also points out that “we are doing our utmost to balance with emotional but mainly intellectual means” the damaging effects of the World War.<sup>44</sup>

We witness a different approach in one of the December 1915 issues of *Jó Pajtás*: an article gives an account of war games and gymnastic exercises directed by a teacher in a fencing school, underlining their positive role in raising young people to become soldiers. In the writer’s view, “life [in the fencing school] is cheerful.

40 The report is quoted by Géza Földes in: “Elemi iskolák beszámolója,” 9.

41 For more details, see for example: “Háborusdit játszottak,” 6; “(A háborusdi vége.),” 9.

42 “Szerkesztő bácsi postája,” 207.

43 See, for example: Lantos diák, “Kis vitéz dala,” 340. (The identity of the author has not been established); Zsoldos, “Lurkó generális,” 214–15; “A hős védők,” 325 (I was unable to establish the author’s identity); Pósa, “A vitézek,” 294.

44 Kemény, “Erős hatások,” 1–2. “Petár” mentioned in the text is Petar I Karadorđević: Peter I, 1903–18: Serbia, 1918–21: the ruler of the Serbian–Croatian–Slovenian Kingdom.

There are war games, and I am convinced that when these young children grow up, they will all become fine soldiers fighting valiantly for the homeland!”<sup>45</sup>

Utilising the findings of long-term research into pedagogical and children's psychology, the Child Study Museum announced a competition in January 1915 to collect works by 3-to-18-year olds on the theme of war, including war games and toys they made themselves. The reasoning is: “In compiling children's works related to the war and their appropriate exhibition not only do we intend to demonstrate the influence of these great times upon the generation now growing up but also wish to pass on lessons to future generations.”<sup>46</sup> Seeing war toys made by children displayed at the *Schule und Krieg* exhibition<sup>47</sup> in Berlin, Dániel Répay, an instructor at the Budapest teacher training college, discovered the business potential in them for the toy manufacturing industry. In his study in issues 9–10 of the 1915 volume of the pedagogical journal *A Gyermek* [Children], he points out the following, giving some guidance to readers: “Many toys can serve as models for toy manufacturers, as they were conceived in children's souls and thus are genuinely intended for children.”<sup>48</sup>

In the second half of World War I, a study was published in the January–February 1917 issue of the *Magyar Paedagogia* [Hungarian Pedagogy] journal addressing the issue of educating children about peace, with the author categorically taking a position against young people owning war toys:

“There are no new materials required for peace-loving education, nor should old concepts be upturned. All that needs to be altered is the spirit of education and the choice of material. A change is starting in educating children in the family; poems and illustrated books on the theme of war should be done away with, as well as toys like swords, rifles, shakos, cannons, and lead soldiers—and the uniform, which not only evokes and strengthens the delusion of grandeur in little ones but is also distasteful.”<sup>49</sup>

The article of the *Pesti Napló* and the previously quoted texts of the reports<sup>50</sup> made by the Transylvanian school show that in 1916–1917, children were less frequently engaged in play activities related to war, which may have contributed to the success of the anti-war games views...

45 Gyula bácsi, “Háborus játékok,” 804. I was unable to establish the identity of “Uncle Gyula.”

46 Ballai and Nagy, “Gyűjtsük össze a gyermekek háborus játékait,” 46.

47 For details, see: *Schule und Krieg*, 118–26.

48 Répay, “Háborús vonatkozású pedagógiai s gyermektanulmányi kiállítások,” 344. For more on Dániel Répay, see, for example: “Répay, Daniel,” 424–25.

49 Nánay, “A békére való nevelés,” 17. For this, see: “Itt a vásár!,” 3.

50 For more on these, see notes 39 and 40 of this study, as well as the related parts of the main body of the text.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, children's war games and toys in Hungary during the period of World War I were in many respects linked to those already known before 1914, even though they were modified and updated in several ways. Of the contemporaneous pedagogical views concerning World War I games and toys, the opinion that such games were useful for training boys to become soldiers had already been present in the early twentieth century in Jakab Barna's work quoted<sup>51</sup> (and connected to the opinions in pre-1914 Hungary about the necessity of young people's military education<sup>52</sup>). The fact that participants were personally concerned with the given conflict is likely to have influenced the trends in Hungarian war games. The conflicts in the pre-1914 war games described (Greco–Turkish, Boer–English, Russo–Japanese, Athens–Sparta, and Rome–Carthage) did not concern Hungarian children as members of a community, a nation, or a family. Thus, fairly balanced power relations could be built between the warring parties, which made genuine struggles possible. But in the World War I games (Hungarians vs. Russians), Hungarian children felt personally involved in the conflict, both as members of the nation, and as members of a family whose members may have been fighting as soldiers. Therefore, obviously the wish for Hungarian victory and the worry about relatives changed the setup of war games: the “Hungarians” were regular winners, without suffering (considerable) losses. Although several details (the popularity of games and toys made by toy manufacturers; the connection between children's toys that had and did not have a war theme between 1914 and 1918; children's games played by adults in these same years<sup>53</sup> etc.) require further research, the above examples and analyses demonstrate that these games and toys, albeit in different ways, were reflections of the World War I period (justifying the conclusions of Pál Náday and Garry E. Chick quoted in the introduction to the present paper<sup>54</sup>). At the same time, in addition to these games

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51 For more on Jakab Barna's work, see note 4 of the present paper and the main body of the text connected to it.

52 For military education, see for example: Tangl, “Katonás nevelés,” 45–67.

53 While in my work there are several examples and analyses demonstrating how in their games children tried to adopt and imitate adults' and soldiers' actions, during World War I there were also accounts of how adults: soldiers played children's games: “War, which kills men, resurrects children from the dead. Old foot-soldiers are playing with buttons by the only wall left standing from a shot-up house, hussars are playing on swings tied to trees on the edge of a forest. Hussars standing in a circle, holding on to each other: they are playing »outside the wolf, inside the lamb«, dancing to the music of an accordion. Here, amidst two deaths—one that they escaped the day before and is imminent the next day—they found in »the now« the carefree childhood through its cheerful games.” Text quoted in Quint, “A háború,” 197–98.

54 For more on the work of Náday and Chick, see notes 1 and 2 of this study and the main body of the text related to it.

and toys reflecting some of the peculiarities of the war (for example, the extensive effect the war had on the most diverse areas of life), the World War also highlighted several characteristics of these games and toys and helped realise their latent potential (for example, war games becoming especially brutal). Pointing beyond itself, this study of games and toys, therefore, also assumes a broader meaning, indicating how cultural phenomena may react to radical historical changes.<sup>55</sup>

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55 For more examples supporting these conclusions, see: Vörös, “»Ha gombóccal hajigálnak, / El is megyek katonának«,” 67–79, with further literature. I hereby express my gratitude for their help rendered for this study to Tünde Császtvay, Katalin Kóthay, Andrea Kreutzer, Ildikó Landgraf, Éva Mikos, Emese Szoleczky, Gergely Romsics, Dániel Szabó and to the reviewers.



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