Few war toys on active duty

Page Six ™

By FRANK DiGIACOMO and JOANNA MOLLOY

HE'S been suited up in desert fatigues for more than eight years. He's been hurt before by an oil shortage. But, no, G.I. Joe will not join the allied forces of Operation Desert Storm.

"What's going on in the Gulf is not a game," says **Wayne Charness**, spokesman for Hasbro Inc., which makes the G.I. Joe doll.

Like other major companies, Hasbro insists it isn't looking at the Middle East bloodshed as a marketing boon for boy's toys.

Representatives of Tonka, Mattel, Nintendo, Parker Bros., and Kenner all told us their firms had no plans to market toys that would capitalize on the Gulf crisis.

But some toy makers are hitching their hopes to the SCUD missiles — counting on the war to sell board games and even a mustachioed **Saddam Hussein** action doll.

"G.I. Joe did extremely well over Christmas," **David Miller**, president of the Toy Manufacturers of America, told PAGE SIX's George Rush. "I'd be surprised if there weren't Gulf-related toys at February's Toy Fair."

Next month, TSR, which makes the Dungeons and Dragons game, introduces "Line in the Sand." Like **President Bush**, who gave the game its name, the player tries to liberate Kuwait. "You try to gain control of Baghdad," explained **Harold Johnson**, spokesman for TSR, whose $29.95 game targets students from junior high through college. "There's also a diplomatic game for people who want to resolve it through words. We're not in favor of warfare. This *is* educational. But you can only make so many Civil War and World War II games."

Avalon Hill Victory Games came out with its $40 "Gulf Strike" game back in 1983. "It started out as a simulation of the Iran-Iraqi war, with the possibility of a superpower intererention," said Avalon Hill president **Jackson Dott**.

"Last year, one of our former VPs, who's now a Pentagon analyst, said, 'I can update the rules.' Now, with the Desert Shield version, you can launch a decapitation strike against Hussein himself. Or, if the Americans haven't pushed the Iraqis out in eight weeks, Hussein can win a political victory."

Tony Gervino, senior editor at Toy and Hobby, has seen a Saddam action doll elsewhere, "but it's sold by some nutty dude on a regional basis."

Would G.I. Joe take him on? "Joe fights C.O.B.R.A., an international terrorist organization," said Hasbro's Charness.

For four years, when oil prices made it too expensive to make his plastic weapons, Joe disappeared.

In 1982, he came back. But, like America's prestige, Joe had shrunk (from 12 inches to under four). History will record, though, that, for the first time, Joe was dressed to fight a desert war. Could a wartime jump in oil prices sideline Joe again?

"It's just too early to tell," said Charness.

False 'Truth'

NOT even game shows are safe from **Joey Skaggs**. The media scammer — who recently bamboozled the press by posing as a Native American surgeon seeking "scalp donors" for bald people — says that when the syndicated show "To Tell the Truth" invited him to stump its celebrity panel, he sent an impostor in his place. When the "real" Skaggs was asked to stand up, the fake hoaxster — purportedly Skaggs pal, **Norman Savage**, took a bow. (A skeptical PAGE SIX obtained a videotape copy of the show and found that the real Skaggs wasn't the "real" Skaggs.) A "Truth" spokeswoman declined to comment, pending a probe of Skaggs' claims. Meanwhile, Joey's having a good laugh. "With a name like 'To Tell the Truth,' " he quipped, "how could they expect to get the real me?"

Cancellations

THE WAR in the Persian Gulf has cast a pall over the city's social calendar. Owners of the Old Homestead restaurant have canceled their 11th Annual Football Widows Party set for tomorrow. Divorce attorney **Raoul Felder** has asked the Brooklyn School for Special Children to postpone the Man of the Year gala it planned to throw in his honor on Feb. 10. And the Middle East crisis will keep France's Prez **Francois Mitterrand** from personally presenting the American Institute of Architects' 1991 Honor Award to **Ian Schrager's** Royalton Hotel in March.



BENNETT: sketchy details

ROY Gerson and his Swing Septet should have played "Doodlin' " the other night when **Tony Bennett** dropped by the Zanzibar and Grill to catch their act. The jazzmen wanted to meet Bennett, but just as they finished their last number, he took off with his fetching gal pal. Then, when they happened to pass his vacant table, the musicians saw that the part-time painter had covered his tablecloth with sketches — of the band. All the players wanted the cloth. Showing the wisdom of Nat King Solomon, Gerson took a scissors and gave everyone a piece of the coveted canvas.



Big gainers

EVEN if the Giants don't win tomorrow's Super Bowl, a couple of the team's stars stand to score a lot. **Brandon Steiner** — whose Steiner Associates sports marketing firm represents more than 30 of the Giants — says running back **Ottis Anderson** and linebacker **Pepper Johnson** are in demand currently on the appearance circuit. Anderson has over 20 speaking engagements lined up plus interest from L.A. Gear, Pepsi and Timex. Pepper's become hot ever since his helmet-less stand against the Bears during the playoffs. One Giant Steiner wishes would do more hustling out of the pocket is QB **Jeff Hostetler**. "I can't tell you how many calls we've gotten for him," he says, "but I've talked to Jeff. He doesn't want to be out there like a piece of meat."

It's hard times for Times reporter

THE New York Times has yanked reporter **David Pitt**, who has covered the Daily News strike since October, off the beat. After News publisher **Jim Hoge** blasted Pitt's Jan. 17 article, Times editors said they discovered that Pitt did not know the identity of a key source who was quoted throughout. Pitt wrote that the source, "speaking on condition of anonymity," said that Hoge "thought he had a deal" with the drivers union, but that the "Tribune Company board of directors shot it down ..." Last Wednesday, the Times in an editor's note stated that the source had been an "anonymous caller ... who over a period of weeks had represented himself as a Tribune official eager to assist the reporter. The reporter never learned the identity of his telephone source, and by quoting him violated The Times's standards of checking and corroboration." According to spokeswoman Nancy Nielsen, Times editor **Max Frankel** "severely reprimanded" Pitt, who offered to resign. The offer was not accepted. "While we consider this a fireable offense, Mr. Pitt has an excellent record," says Nielsen. "Mr. Pitt is no longer receiving reporting assignments and the editors are discussing a total change of assignment with him." Nielsen confirmed that editors had not asked the 12-year veteran who his source was until the paper got flak from Hoge. "Up to that point it was thought that David had a credible source without the editor knowing the name of the source," she says. "But when we cite anonymous sources in a story we know their identification." Nielsen added that Frankel "has expressed his regrets directly to Mr. Hoge." Pitt did not return calls.

Jet lagged

THE New York Times has one staffer who's not happy to be on the warfront. The paper sent technician **Walter Barenger** to Saudi Arabia to set up a satellite transmitter. Barenger was due to leave Dhahran Jan. 14 — a day before the U.N.-imposed deadline for **Saddam Hussein** to withdraw from Kuwait — but when he got to the airport he found the flights overbooked. He then called the Times, which booked him a flight with Austrian Airlines. When Barenger returned to the airport, baffled airport officials told him his flight number didn't exist. "The trouble was with the airline," says a Times spokeswoman. "They thought it was 'Tehran.' That's where it went awry." Barenger is still in Saudi Arabia.



SUZY: sweet on a Swede

SUZY Chaffee will have a harder time keeping her lips from chapping now that they're all over her new beau **Osvald Bielland**. The former Olympic skier and the Swedish management consultant — who've been melting snow for three months now — were spotted at Tatou the other night celebrating Suzy's appearance in Ski Magazine's "Girls of Winter" issue.