Board game - Battle of the Little Big Horn

Object: Board game

Place of origin: England (made)

Date: 1964 (made)

Artist/Maker: Waddingtons Limited (manufacturer)

Materials and Techniques: moulded plastic figures; card playing board; cardboard box and insert

Credit Line: Given by Mrs June Hilley

Museum number: B.68:1 to 28-2015

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

This Battle of Little Big Horn board game was played with over several years by the same family during the 1960s and 1970s. These decades were a boom time for the production and playing of board games in Britain, when companies such as Waddingtons and Parkers designed and published a profusion of all types of game.

This is a two player strategic game where history can be re-written as General Custer can end up victorious.

Descriptive line

Boxed board game, Battle of the Little Big Horn, made in England by Waddingtons, 1964

Physical description

Boxed board game, 'Battle of the Little Big Horn' comprising box lid and base, a box insert, rectangular tri-fold playing board and twenty two playing pieces. The cardboard box lid is colour printed with the game title, a drawing of the playing board and a painted illustration of a column of mounted American Cavalrymen riding through a valley with mounted American Indians watching from the hilltop above. The image wraps round onto the box sides and all four sides have the title printed in black text. One corner of the box lid is split and some of the paper is torn, across the text 'TL' of BATTLE. The cardboard box base is white on the exterior, brown on the interior. Text about the historical background of the game and rule outlines, including a line drawing, are printed in black ink on the base of the box. Inside the box is a green cardboard insert with 3 pieces of red card folded into rectangles and slotted into the green card to make 7 compartments in which the playing pieces are housed.

Playing pieces comprise 22 plastic figures: General Custer, Custer's flag, 2 Cavalry Officers with sword and revolvers, 3 standing shooting Cavalrymen, 3 kneeling, shooting Cavalrymen, 3 mounted American Indian Chiefs, 3 mounted American Indians with tomahawks and bows, 3 standing Indians with rifles across hips, 3 standing shooting Indians.

The mounted figures have plastic protrusions on the back of their ankles which fit into holes either side of the horses' flank and keep the riders in place on the horses.

There are two dice and a folded A4 white sheet of paper, photocopied with the game rules.

The playing face of the game board is covered in paper printed with the Little Big Horn battleground map featuring, in the centre of the map, a cluster of blue triangles and images of horses, barrels and boxes. At the left and right edges of the gameboard are red triangles, those on the right hand side feature horse head images. The playing area of the board face is an illustration of a grassy, rocky plain made up of trees, teepees and a stream with rocks, which runs top to bottom across the left hand edge of the playing face. The reverse side of the playing board is covered in black paper. A strip of black cotton webbing is glued along the length of both of the folds.

Dimensions

Length: 50.2 cm box lid, Width: 25.8 cm box lid, Depth: 3.1 cm box lid, Length: 49.5 cm box base, Width: 25.1 cm box base, Depth: 3 cm box base, Length: 49.1 cm box insert, Width: 24.8 cm box insert, Depth: 2.4 cm box insert, Height: 49.3 cm playing board, folded, Width: 24.7 cm playing board, unfolded, Height: 4 cm playing piece: General Custer, Width: 3.3 cm playing piece: U.S. Cavalry Officers with sword and revolver, Height: 5.5 cm playing pieces: U.S. Cavalry Officers with sword and revolver, Height: 4.2 cm playing pieces: standing shooting Cavalrymen, Width: 3 cm playing pieces: kneeling shooting Cavalrymen, Height: 7.5 cm playing piece: mounted American Indian, Length: 8 cm playing piece: mounted American Indians with tomahawk and bow, Width: 3 cm playing piece: American Indians with rifle across hip, Width: 3 cm playing piece: American Indians with rifle across hip, Depth: 1.3 cm playing piece: American Indians with rifle across
Object history note

The company of John Waddington was established in Leeds in the 19th century as a printing firm. It started producing playing cards in the early 1920s and soon diversified into board and other games, becoming the foremost producer of games in Britain until the 1990s when the company was taken over by Hasbro.

Information about the Battle of Little Big Horn, taken from www.history.com:

In 1876, Native American forces led by Chiefs Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull defeated the U.S. Army troops of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer in a battle near southern Montana's Little Bighorn River. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, leaders of the Sioux tribe on the Great Plains, strongly resisted the mid-19th-century efforts of the U.S. government to confine their people to reservations. In 1875, after gold was discovered in South Dakota's Black Hills, the U.S. Army ignored previous treaty agreements and invaded the region. This betrayal led many Sioux and Cheyenne tribesmen to leave their reservations and join Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse in Montana. By the late spring of 1876, more than 10,000 Native Americans had gathered in a camp along the Little Bighorn River—which they called the Greasy Grass—in defiance of a U.S. War Department order to return to their reservations or risk being attacked.

In mid-June, three columns of U.S. soldiers lined up against the camp and prepared to march. A force of 1,200 Native Americans arrived on June 25, Custer drew near the camp and decided to press on ahead rather than wait for reinforcements. At mid-day, Custer's 600 men entered the Little Bighorn Valley. Among the Native Americans, word quickly spread of the impending attack. The older Sitting Bull rallied the warriors and saw to the safety of the women and children, while Crazy Horse set off with a large force to meet the attackers head on.

Despite Custer's desperate attempts to regroup his men, they were quickly overwhelmed. Custer and some 200 men in his battalion were attacked by as many as 3,000 Native Americans and Custer died in battle along with the majority of his men.

The Battle of Little Bighorn—also called Custer's Last Stand—marked the most decisive Native American victory and the worst U.S. Army defeat in the long Plains Indian War. The fate of Custer and his men outraged many white Americans and the U.S. government increased its efforts to subdue the tribes. Within five years, almost all of the Sioux and Cheyenne would be confined to reservations.

Text about the game 'Battle of the Little Big Horn' as printed on the base of the game box:

In 1876 was fought one of the epic battles of North-West American history, BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIG HORN. The Sioux and Cheyenne Indians were increasingly hostile to the prospectors pouring across North and South Dakota. Chief Sitting Bull gathered a force, by the Little Big Horn River, just north of the Montana-Wyoming border, ready to strike. Three columns of U.S. Cavalry were despatched to subdue the Indians.

The main force stopped short of the Indian camp. General Custer was sent ahead to make contact but to await support before attacking. However, nearing the Little Big Horn, Custer, his movements now being watched, decided to attack at once - what he did not know was that Sitting Bull had assembled an unusually big force of 4,000 braves.

He divided his men, and with the main force, rode straight for the centre of the Indian Camp. He was quickly surrounded. Greatly outnumbered, Custer fought his way back, but the odds were too heavy and his force was destroyed.

Now you can re-live this historic battle, but you can plan your own strategy. Can you find a way to get Custer, or at least his flag, clear of the battlefield?

The opportunities for developing different tactics are endless. This is the most realistic and absorbing battle game ever.'

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1400264/battle-of-the-little-big-board-game-waddingtons-limited/