



"Little green army men" will soon feature female toy soldiers

By Brigit Katz, Smithsonian.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.03.19

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Image 1. Here is the first sculpted version of the "plastic army women" collector series. Photo by: BMC Toys

Since the 1930s, kids have been playing with little green army men. Those iconic figurines were made out of plastic and posed into various combat positions. They were made famous by "Toy Story." Come Christmas of next year, the platoon of little green army men will be expanded to include little green army women. This is thanks in part to a 6-year-old girl.

Vivian Lord recently wrote to BMC Toys. It is one of the last remaining manufacturers of the figurines. She asked why the company does not make "girl army men."

Her letter was filled with six-year-old spelling errors. "My freinds mom is in the army to!" the letter said. "Pleaes can you make army girls that look like women. I would play with them evry day and my freinds would to!"

Jeff Imel is the owner of BMC Toys. This wasn't the first time he had received a query about introducing female troops. In 2018, he was contacted by JoAnn Ortloff. She is a retired fleet master chief. She was hoping to buy female toy soldiers for her granddaughters and "and made a

compelling case for why Plastic Army Women should be produced," Imel writes in a blog post. He also notes that he had already been thinking about introducing women to the little green army. However, he had struggled to come up with the necessary funds.

"By the time you figure out the cost of everything involved in making an original set of plastic toy figures in this size," Imel said. He is BMC Toys' only full-time employee. "It starts around the cost of a modest new car."



But after receiving Vivian's letter — and the suite of media requests that followed it — Imel decided that the time was finally right for little green army women to make their debut. He has prepared a budget that will allow for at least four different poses in a pack of about 24 figurines. He has already commissioned a sculpture for the set's first pose: a female soldier, kitted out in combat gear and clutching a gun and a pair of binoculars.

"My current thinking is the next figures would be standing with rifle, prone shooting rifle (maybe sniper), and kneeling firing bazooka," Imel writes. "I think that's a good assortment for a basic set that would be the most fun and useful for 'plastic Army' play."

Speaking to NPR, Ortloff explains that she thinks it is important that female toy soldiers exist to reflect the increasing integration of women into combat roles within the U.S. military. "It's time that we have some equal representation in our toy soldiers to pass down," Ortloff says.

However, just like the male toy soldiers, the little green army women will be fashioned in the style of mid-20th century troops. That is long before the U.S. Army opened all of its combat roles to women. (That only happened in 2015.) But Imel contends that the anachronism is beside the point.

"Every kid wants to be the hero of their story," he tells Allyn. "It shouldn't be up to us to decide who the hero is. Girls should be able to connect to the toys just as much as boys do."

Imel has committed to getting female toy soldiers on shelves by Christmas 2020, and he plans to launch a crowdfunding campaign to help finance the project. Little Vivian Lord, for one, is excited to welcome "girl army men" to her collection.

"I might just get the boy army men out of the way," she says in an interview with WBRE, "and just play with the girls."

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article BEST introduces Vivian's plea?
- (A) This is thanks in part to a 6-year-old girl.
 - (B) Vivian Lord recently wrote to BMC Toys.
 - (C) She asked why the company does not make "girl army men."
 - (D) "My freinds mom is in the army to!" the letter reads (spelling and grammar errors included).
- 2 What is MOST likely the reason the author included the information about JoAnn Ortloff?
- (A) to show Vivian's request has the full support of fleet master chiefs
 - (B) to show Vivian's letter was not the first request for little green army women
 - (C) to explain why Imel finally decided to launch a crowdfunding campaign
 - (D) to explain why little green army women will be fashioned in the style of 1950s troops
- 3 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Since the 1930s, kids have been playing with little green army men.
 - (B) Come Christmas of next year, the platoon of little green army men will be expanded to include little green army women.
 - (C) He has already commissioned a sculpture for the set's first pose: a female soldier, kitted out in combat gear and clutching a gun and a pair of binoculars.
 - (D) That is long before the U.S. Army opened all of its combat roles to women.

- 4 Read the following detail from the article.

"By the time you figure out the cost of everything involved in making an original set of plastic toy figures in this size," Imel said. He is BMC Toys' only full-time employee. "It starts around the cost of a modest new car."

How does this detail develop the article's central idea?

- (A) It highlights the recent demand for expanding the platoon of little green army men.
- (B) It helps explain why BMC Toys is one of the last remaining manufacturers of plastic troops.
- (C) It highlights the success of Imel's crowdfunding campaign to finance little green army women.
- (D) It helps explain why Imel had put off creating a set of little green army women.

