

A Guide to the Pirates Mini-figures Part II

It's A Pirate World - We Just Live In It

Not surprisingly, the pirates were the stars of their theme. It's hard to march the swashbuckling coolness of a toy pirate ship like the Black Seas Barracuda or the Skull's Eye Schooner.

Still, there were many pirate toys out there. What really set the LEGO Pirates apart from competing pirate playsets were their adversaries. Most other pirate toys, from Playmobil to Fisher Price's Great Adventure line, featured swarms of pirates and several cool pirate ships...

But these buccaneers apparently just fought among themselves, having little to nothing in the way of non-pirate enemies.

It's true that the LEGO Pirates had the most figures and the biggest ships - but they weren't the only faction afloat.

The LEGO Group produced some well thought out enemies for the Pirates to steal from, or be hunted by. And these figures were some of the best ever made!



Sure, Playmobil has a few soldier sets...



But they only made one non-pirate ship!



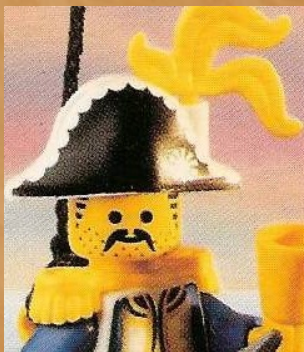
Fisher Price went with good and bad pirates

The Soldiers

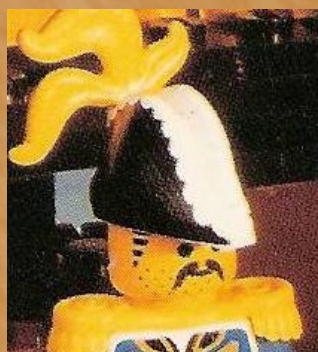
1989 - 1993

The first group to challenge the pirates was the Soldiers, an informal and obvious name for the blue-coated men who protected the gold coins the pirates coveted. Along with the Pirate captain, they were the first minifigures to wear the epaulet accessories. The soldiers are slightly anachronistic, as the Pirate theme is based on the pirates of the early eighteenth century, while the bicorne and shakos of the Soldiers were not in widespread use until the late eighteenth century.

One of the rarest Pirate figures ever, the Governor only appeared in two expensive sets, the 6274 Caribbean Clipper and the 6276 Eldorado Fortress. He wears a fancy bicorne hat, a clever re-use of the same mold used for the Pirate captain's hat. In place of the skull-and-crossbones, the Governor's hat is trimmed in white, with a cockade that resembles an asterisk. Just like the real thing, the LEGO bicorne can be worn either "fore and aft" or "athwart"—the Governor wears it both ways.



Fore and aft



Athwart

The Governor



Cheese, bread, gold coins... Some things are just better with wine.

The hat also has a hole in which a feather can be placed—he wears either a red or yellow triple-plume taken from the Castle sets. This type of feather was the only one to be used in Pirate sets until 1996. As those who collected LEGO sets at the time know, plumes came attached three to a plastic wheel, from which they had to be removed. (I haven't done this in years!) This left LEGO Pirate collectors with two other plumes to do with as they pleased.

The Soldiers

1989 - 1993

The Governor seems surprisingly scruffy for a man of his rank. He has a large, droopy mustache and stubble equal that of any pirate. His face is framed by a series of black lines that have been alternately interpreted as representing sideburns or a wig. Like the Pirate captain, the Governor's head was intended to represent a specific character—one of the first times LEGO did so—and so was never used twice in a set or on any other figure.

The Governor has a unique torso, one of only two used for the Soldiers. It features a blue coat with gold and black trim, and a white waistcoat with gold buttons. Like all the uniformed soldiers, the Governor has a pair of white legs. Unlike the other Soldier torsos, this one has no belt printed on it, which leads one to wonder just where the Governor wears his sword. Because of this fact, this torso and its later red counterpart can be used as regular eighteenth century formal wear.



"When we find the treasure I'll be able to afford some doors for this cabin"



He also wears yellow epaulets, which were used to indicate a high rank in the Pirate theme. The Time Twister mini-figures later adopted them, probably out of vain self-importance.

The Soldiers

1989 - 1993

The Lieutenant is the second-in-command of the Soldiers, and ventures into the field far more often than the Governor. He was found in all other Soldier sets, so while he only came one to a set, most collectors have several of these figures.

The Lieutenant wears a common black tricorne, which also has a hole for a feather—but was never used. His reddish-brown hair is extremely untidy—disheveled, no doubt, in his constant battles with the Pirates. He also has a fine mustache and an impressive beard.

The Lieutenant



Pirates beware!



Tavern ambush

Like the Governor, the Lieutenant also wears yellow epaulets. His torso features a blue coat trimmed in black and gold checks, and crisscrossed white belts with a silver buckle. This figure has evidently been serving king and country for centuries; his head was used frequently in the Castle theme.



He's blue! (Da ba de da ba di!)

His head was also used for “the merchant” in the 6277 Imperial Trading Post and a sailor in 6285 Skull’s Eye Schooner. He later returned as another blue soldier in the Western sets, though apparently at a lower rank.



The Soldiers

1989 - 1993



Gentlemen, start your...
Cannon?

One interesting thing about the Soldier figures was that LEGO twice used different hats to expand the Soldier ranks beyond the usual Governor/Lieutenant/Troops triad of figures for individual sets.

In the Harbor Sentry set, this figure became a gunner with the addition of a plain black bicorne in place of the tricorne hat. This is the only use of that hat in the Pirate theme proper, however, it has since appeared in two Pirate-related offerings: the promotional Studios set 1411 and, much more recently, in the 7029 Skeleton Ship Attack.

Though he is the most common Soldier figure, often coming two or more to a set, the Trooper is actually quite impressive.

With an extra-tall shako (topped with a black plume!) red epaulets and a backpack, a Trooper was, for a time, was the tallest figure in the whole Pirate theme.

The Troops



Hup, two, three, four,
right, left...



The Soldiers

1989 - 1993

As I mentioned earlier, those shakos, awesome though they may be, are actually a bit of an anachronism. Shakos weren't widely adopted by European armies until the latter half of the 18th century, several decades after Jolly Roger-waving pirates were driven from the seas. Because the shako was used in many armies during the nineteenth century, adult fans of LEGO and military history have created huge Napoleonic War-era armies of mini figures, resulting in something of a shako shortage.

I was surprised to learn about this helmet deficit, as shakos had been produced for seven years straight. I also thought my army of twenty had plenty of shako sporting soldiers. Then I found out that some collectors had amassed armies upwards of two hundred figures.

That explains it.

"Arrrrr! I'm a gonna make me a fortune on Bricklink!"

Follow the directions.



Don't put the backpack on first - it just looks silly.



The Soldiers

1989 - 1993



Fortunately, the Troopers are as good at getting out of a jail as they are putting pirates into one...

The Trooper face—the classic smiley—is a throwback to the smiling hordes of Castle knights and foot soldiers. The combination of a bland smile with a military uniform and weapons is quite sinister. This soldier is clearly ready for long expeditions, as he comes equipped with a brown backpack—the only backpack LEGO figures had until 1998, and it is still the smallest. It has been used, in various colors, in many Town and Star Wars sets. The Trooper wears the red epaulets of low rank; surprisingly, these were used in the Space Police sets on the Space Police Chief. Ogel's drones in the Alpha Team sets also wore red epaulets.

The Troopers share their torso with the Lieutenant. In another case of LEGO using different hats to create different types of soldiers, the Caribbean Clipper included three sailors—Trooper minifigures sans backpacks, and with tricorner hats instead of hats.

This was an excellent idea, as it freed up the regular troopers to storm the Pirate ships and bases. Unfortunately, it was not used with the Soldier's replacement army, the grand, imposing—and well red—Imperial Guards!



A good reason to smile!

Next Time...

Enter the The Imperial Guards!



Credits

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