



THE DECLASSIFIED REPORT

by Chris "Werecat" Chung

Welcome friends! It's been a wild ride so far. For the last 44 years G.I. Joe has been slowly weaving its way in and out of our lives, transforming itself from a mere toy franchise to a true and dedicated cultural meme.

Over 25 years ago, the stage was set by Hasbro to introduce something new to its G.I. Joe line. The company enlisted us into a brand new outfit with the promise of bold new adventures fighting our most deadly enemy to date: the evil terrorist organization of Cobra Command. Despite a few bumps in the road, it's been a battle that has never ceased.

From cartoons, comic books, videogames, and an upcoming live-action film in 2009, to all the incarnations of toys: 12", 3 3/4", Sgt. Savage, Extreme, Sigma 6, Combat Heroes, and beyond, G.I. Joe has proven itself to be a lasting entity, and a cultural phenomenon that has expanded world wide.

When we were children playing with our Joes outside on our lawns or in our basements, did any of us ever expect that a quarter of a century later, we would still be collecting?

There is something about the G.I. Joe mythos that is oddly alluring. Were we not supposed to leave our youthful pursuits behind us? Some of us did, but some of us also went back. Why? What exactly is it about this line that has captivated millions, and causes us to cling to its cultural psyche? Is it an obsession? Or a connection to a simpler time? I honestly can't say. However, I propose that the seduction is in part because when good and evil are easily defined, the world has a logical order that we long to understand.

With this preface aside, what does all this have to do with **THE DECLASSIFIED REPORT**?

What you have before you is the first in a series of newsletters designed to get you closer to the internal dynamics of the G.I. Joe industry. From past and present insiders who worked on the line, to authors, historians, experts, and apex collectors, we've compiled the largest list of contributors to bring you information that has been mostly classified or forgotten.

Like you, we are fans and collectors. **THE DECLASSIFIED REPORT** is *by* collectors *for* collectors. For too many years, fascinating and vital information about G.I. Joe has been filed away behind locked doors, forgotten, discarded, or carefully guarded. We wanted to know more about the toy line that launched our imaginations, lifestyles, and in some cases, careers, and we want to share the insights and reflections of the contributors with you.

Battle Rangers Dr. Mindbender

by Mike "Mike T." Taber

The '90's were a tough time to be a Joe fan. While the decade started off fairly strong, it quickly regressed into a panoply of neon colors, spring loaded accessories and gimmicky subsets which peaked in 1993. In 1994 Hasbro started to rein in their designs and the colors became more muted and the subsets were toned down. This trend was going to continue into 1995 with the introduction of the Battle Corps Rangers. These figures were intended to be a return to Joe's traditional roots, and were going to feature many classic characters in more subdued and militaristic colors. Unfortunately the damage had been done by previous years, and Joe was no longer strong enough at retail to survive the internal politics of Hasbro and their newly acquired subsidiary Kenner (as detailed in the book *Toy Wars* by G. Wayne Miller). As such, the Joe line died in 1994 and the Battle Corps Rangers never saw a retail release.

Fortunately for collectors, some tidbits of this last attempt to salvage the G.I. Joe line have survived. In some cases, we have artwork from unproduced toys. There are some last minute licensed products that feature insights into some of the figures we might have seen at retail, and there are unproduced resin prototypes of a select few Battle Corps Rangers figures. It's these that are the most significant since they showcase the actual toys themselves.

Today we have surviving examples of the Baroness, an unknown figure that could be Flint or Falcon, the mold that was either going to be Shipwreck or Footloose (or possibly both of them!), and the figure you see here: Dr. Mindbender.

To me, this Dr. Mindbender figure is the most significant remnant of the Battle Corps Rangers era since it was such a drastic departure from what we'd previously seen of the character. This version followed up on his 1993 release by showcasing the scars resulting from the surgeries that would have removed the mechanical implants from the 1993 design. It is a macabre and grisly figure that features Frankenstein-esque sutures and a hardened countenance that denotes the pain inherent in such a transformation.



The most visually striking detail of the figure is the scarred left hand. This deformed monstrosity is unexplained, but is the hallmark of this figure. The hand features bones rising out of the skin at the tips, and an odd webbing between the lower fingers. It is likely this would have been explained on the figure's filecard, but without it we can only speculate as to the purpose of this horrid detail.

In recent years, we have finally been able to view the intended color scheme for this Dr. Mindbender from a hand painted prototype in a private collection. The figure would have been primarily purple and black. The scar on the back of his head would have been a faint pink, and the entire body would have been largely devoid of additional paint applications. By 1994 Hasbro had gone skimpy on extra paint, and it's likely this trend would have continued to 1995. This is important because the painted Dr. Mindbender is designed to appear as though he has gloves. It's a shame that such detailed sculpting on his left hand would have gone unpainted in flesh tone, and instead, be lost in a sea of purple. In that regard, I prefer the unpainted prototype version you see since it accentuates the detail and allows the imagination to run wild in speculation as to the paint design.



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This figure would also have included a helmet. The helmet has two protruding hoses that would have attached to the back. On the prototype the hoses are hard resin and will not move, but the presence of the holes on the back indicates Hasbro likely had plans to make the hoses flexible so they would plug into the helmet. The helmet is a bit Darth Vader-y; especially if the intention was for it to house life support for the deformed Doctor, but the design is strong and it fits the figure perfectly. It would have also given the figure more versatility to the potential consumers of 1995.

Recent material from 1995 also shows that this mold might have been reused on a new Cobra character as well. On the box art for the unreleased Tactical Battle Platform, you can see a Cobra attacking the base. His body is clearly that of Dr. Mindbender, but his head is different. So different, that it doesn't look human. Could these have been unreleased troops who would have been assigned to Mindbender? Or were they just another example of Hasbro re-using molds in the line's final years? Regardless, it's an interesting footnote to the history of this mold.



Estimates put the number of Dr. Mindbenders in existence at between 6 and 12. (This is an estimate based on the standard numbers of resin prototypes that Hasbro typically produced at the time, plus, there are at least 6 of them known in the collecting world today.) It's not a figure that often changes hands, and it remains one of the most historically significant unproduced figures from the line's final year. The more material from 1995 that surfaces really shows that collectors missed out on some great figures and designs due to the line's cancellation. The return to a more military themed approach would have brought some figures that would likely be highly regarded by modern collectors. Some of the details of this figure show that the line probably would not have appeased everyone, but it was a step in the right direction. It's just too bad that we never had the opportunity to see it fully realized.



The Story of the Unreleased Roadblock Halloween Costume

by Roger "Goofateer" Taft

I call this costume "unreleased" for a very good reason. First, I have to ask: have you ever seen one? ...I thought not.

I've been searching for a store-bought version of this costume since 1999. In all that time I've NEVER found a full production Roadblock Halloween costume, I've never seen a photo of one, and I've never even found another collector that had one.

But I have found prototypes for it. How do I even know that this is in fact, a Roadblock costume?



In 1999 I had just moved to Kentucky. While walking past the Halloween section of the local K-Mart, the G.I. Joe logo caught my eye. There on the pegs; a full seven years after it's initial release was not one, but three Duke Halloween costumes. I just had to buy one. (It was actually the first G.I. Joe Halloween costume I had ever bought.) I told the story on-line, and someone replied "You didn't happen to find a Roadblock to go with it did you?" I can't remember who had asked me or why, but my answer was obviously "No." I had never even heard that there was a Roadblock costume, so why would I have thought to look for one? But once I had the information, from that point on it was my mission to find Roadblock.

I looked for it everywhere. I posted on message boards. I searched eBay at least weekly. (And more often every Halloween.) I searched at every G.I. Joe convention and I asked just about every collector I knew. Unfortunately it was just not to be found. After five years I had all but given up. It just wasn't out there. Or so I thought.

Then one day I found it on eBay. Not just a simple boxed store-bought costume though. Oh no, this was a complete pre-production approval sample Roadblock costume. It had a hand painted mask, and the costume was apparently silk rather than the vinyl full production costumes commonly used at the time. Most important of all, it came with the approval paperwork. All the information was there, including a very important aspect: "Hasbro, 1992 approval sample." I had finally found my grail!



But that was just the tip of the iceberg. That find lead to others, and now I knew where to look. As it turned out, it had been purchased from the Collegeville Costumes warehouse liquidation sale some time in the mid 1990's after the company closed its doors, and it certainly wasn't the only G.I. Joe costume bought at the event.

I was able to track down a few more contacts, all of whom had gone to the factory liquidation sale. Among them was a seller that had several more Roadblock masks. They were a step farther along in production, but probably still in the approval process. The colors differed greatly from the one I had already found, and they had a very matte finish with a hand sprayed appearance. They looked very different from the high-gloss Duke mask of the same year, and they were marked "Taiwan" on the chin.

Not long after that I found more Roadblock masks. This time they were marked "USA" on the chin. They had a much more glossy finish, but still not like the original Duke I had found at K-Mart. The colors were different from the previous two versions, but much closer to the original hand painted mask than the one from Taiwan.

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Now I should clarify the term "hand painted" in this context: I believe that technically all of these Roadblock masks are hand painted. But I don't mean that they were painted with a brush. Instead, I mean that they do not appear to have been painted by a machine. It looks as though the artist placed the various paint masks [or printing plates, or silk screen, which ever is the proper term in this context?] over the mask, and spray painted them by hand. I've come to this conclusion because each mask is slightly different. The paint masks move slightly in relationship to each other, and paint coverage is not as consistent as one would normally find on a store bought product.

I do believe that they are NOT final production masks. Considering that they have the copyright information and country of origin imprinted on them, I suspect that they are pre-production samples from the various factories. As further evidence to back that theory up, I was able to find pre-production samples for the Duke mask from the USA factory, and another in China. These two masks were extremely similar to the final store bought masks—especially in the case of the USA mask, but the China Duke has a very pale skin color that was corrected at some point. I can't be certain that all of the store bought Chinese Duke's have the corrected skin color, but these samples are the only one's I've ever run across that are this pale. Given the context, I'm reasonably certain that the USA Duke and Roadblock; the China Duke; and the Taiwan Roadblock, are all pre-production samples.



Now let's turn our attention to the costumes themselves. To date, I've been able to add two complete approval sample costumes to my collection. Both are silk, and both have approval paperwork stapled to them. The Roadblock costume is dated 3-5-92, while the virtually identical Duke costume is dated 9-14-92. So some time in the intervening six months, the powers-that-be decided that Duke was more marketable than Roadblock.

You will notice in the photographs that there are several key differences between the two costumes. Most notably the 'Duke' name tag, and the complete lack of one on the earlier Roadblock costume. Roadblock also has a red collar for no apparent reason, and in general, the colors are more vibrant on Duke.

Lastly; and perhaps most importantly, Roadblock sports a plain orange 'American Flag' on his belt buckle, while Duke has one in full red, white, and blue.

I hope you have enjoyed this quick look at a very unexplored corner of the G.I. Joe universe. There is a lot more to uncover, and a great deal of additional information on the subject will be available very soon on my web site: <http://www.captcosmos-collect.com/servlet/StoreFront>

One final thing, if you have any additional information to add to my story, or by chance actually have a store bought Roadblock costume—or any other unreleased G.I. Joe costumes, then by all means, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you!

Roger Taft,
Owner and operator of Captain Cosmos Collectibles, in Winchester Kentucky.

Collector Profile: Viper109

Who are you?

My name is Jason Wells A.K.A. VIPER109, A.K.A. BAD DOC 1.

Please tell us a little about yourself.

I'm 32 years old and I'm married to my lovely wife, Heather. I'm a team medic in the U.S. Navy currently stationed with MARSOC.

How long have you been collecting?

Growing up, most of my childhood was spent creating epic battles between G.I. Joe and Cobra, but about the age of 12 - 13 years old, I started losing interest in the toys and moved on to the pursuit of girls, cars, and sports. By the age of 15 I had given all my Joes away to some kid in my church. This should have been the end of my interest in G.I. Joe, but one day in 1997 I decided I needed a hobby. In my pursuit of this, I stopped by my local hobby/comic shop which just happened to be selling someone's childhood G.I. Joe collection on consignment. After a few phone calls and a few offers and counter-offers, I walked out of there with everything he had for about \$300.00; which was, if memory serves me, most of the '83 - '84 line. That, and the Toys 'R Us '97 line got me hooked again, and I have been collecting ever since.



What's your favorite piece in your collection?

My '86 Viper collection.

What was your first Joe figure?

Tripwire

What kind of Joe items do you collect?

Almost every thing!

Collector Profile: Viper109

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What's the primary focus of your collection?

I have a very broad approach to my collection. I'm a completist in as far as I collect everything that comes out in the ARAH mold. I have a complete '82 - '94 line except for a Viper Glider and a Sears exclusive Missile Command Center that I accidentally threw away back in 2005. (I was physically sick after I realized what I did, and I have not been able to bring myself to replace them.) I also focus on army building, but not every troop builder that hits the shelves. I try to keep my larger armies limited to Vipers and B.A.T.s, and subsequent re-releases of those molds. Foreign items I buy for whatever strikes my fancy. Comic art and production art is also a big interest of mine. Finally I also like to collect memorabilia from people that have influenced the hobby; from Peter Hubner's PROJECT: PDD cards, to James DeSimone's convention custom/exclusives...



Which piece was the hardest to acquire?

Well, back in the day before I started buying Joe's on the net, getting a Tomahawk helicopter was a real pain.

What's your favorite Joe related memory?

The Minneapolis G.I. Joe convention---well, what I can remember from it.



Why Does the 12" G.I. Joe Line Have Such a Faithful Following?

by Roger "Goofateer" Taft

I was asked to write this article based on a simple question: Considering the generally superior quality, detail, and historical accuracy of other 12" military action figure lines, why does the original 12" G.I. Joe line still have such a faithful following?

Being one of only a handful of G.I. Joe collectors that collects all eras and scales of G.I. Joe, I do have my own opinions on the subject, but I decided to start by posing the question to other hardcore vintage collectors. The overwhelming and simple answer was nostalgia, and the comradery that comes from a shared childhood. It really doesn't get much more complicated than that.

So then I had to ask myself, why is the answer so simple?

I think there are several factors at play here. First, the modern 12" toy market really began in 1991 with the release of the Target exclusive 12" G.I. Joe Hall of Fame Duke. It was the first American released 12" Joe figure in about 15 years, and Duke sold out within hours across the country. Even though the figure was of fairly poor quality, there was clearly a demand for 12" scale action figures, and it pretty much spawned a new industry all by itself. Since then several companies have cropped up that specialize in high quality, highly detailed, and historically accurate 12" action figures. But one simple fact remains. No one has grown up with them. At least not yet.

Most of these companies such as BBI, Dragon, and Sideshow just to name a few are aimed squarely at the collector market. Most of them start at \$30 per figure, and many even top out at over \$100. Not many parents are willing to hand over a \$100 limited edition action figure to their ten year old. So while the modern collector figure may be superior, not many people have fond childhood memories of storming the sandbox with an action figure from Sideshow toys. And in my opinion it's likely that very few people ever will.

Additionally, these high end figures are big on display and detail, but not so much on playability and fun. In order to archive greater levels of realism, the plastics used have to be harder, and as a result, are more brittle. I know that sounds like an oxymoron, but softer, more pliable plastics hold up much better to play than harder ones. I often hear stories of collectors opening a \$50 or more toy, and having a part break right out of the box. That's just no fun.

A second major factor in Joe's success, is, he's a blank slate. Hasbro's original marketing plan was actually quite brilliant. They provided a child with all the tools for just about any adventure imaginable, but they never actually made G.I. Joe a specific character. That left him open for anything a kid could dream up. G.I. Joe wasn't Sgt. Rock, Nick Fury, or even Batman. But if he wanted to be, he could be all those things and more. Sgt. Rock couldn't go on a James Bond spy mission any more than Batman could fight Nazi's. Granted sometimes they did, but it never felt right. With G.I. Joe any adventure worked because he was cast as the Everyman, not the super man.



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The very first G.I. Joe I ever owned was certainly an Everyman. In fact, I had no idea who he was at the time. He was most likely bought at a garage sale in the late 1970's with a box of accessories and the massive blow-molded Defenders tank. In reality, he was a 12" talking hard-hands Adventure Team Commander. And as it turns out I had his "correct" outfit all along, but to me, he was a tank commander, and I dressed him as such. He drove the Defenders tank everywhere—or at least everywhere within the confines of the attic where I usually played with it. Occasionally he would even go mountain climbing on the pull-down stair case, or even make his way out to the savannas the our large front yard.

I didn't have him all that long before he was safely stored away in my toy box for the larger universe of Star Wars. Eventually Star Wars gave way to G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero; which to my young mind was something completely new and revolutionary with no forerunner what-so-ever. I even remember running to my parents one day exclaiming that I wanted the completely new G.I. Joe toys, not being aware that my old 12" fuzzy-headed friend was responsible for all the new, relatively "tiny" fully sculpted figures.

Sometime later I made the connection between the two, though it certainly wasn't through my friends, as I don't remember any of them having a 12" G.I. Joe. In those early days I did have a busted-up old space capsule with the G.I. Joe name emblazoned across it, but I distinctly remember letting it go at a garage sale around 1980. Perhaps the name association was what lead me to make the connection between new and old?

As I continued to notice the similarities between the two G.I. Joe lines, I realized the AT Commander bore a striking resemblance to the 1982 G.I. Joe V.A.M.P. driver, Clutch, as they both had dark hair and a beard. The "tank commander" outfit my fuzzy-head wore also looked a little like Clutch's outfit. From that point on Clutch was G.I. Joe to me. I even went so far as to tape over Clutch's name on his file card and carefully (though crudely), rewrite the name 'G.I. Joe.'

The connection between the 12" line and the 3 3/4" line made me realize there was a larger history that I wasn't yet aware of. Not simply the history of the toys themselves, but the world around me as well. That, more than likely, lead to the way I collect now. I don't just collect for the nostalgia, instead I delve into the history of a toy. I want to know everything about it: how it was made, what brought it about, what else is it connected to. *Everything.*

It's amazing how something so simple such as a childhood toy can affect they way you see the world. I know my first 12" G.I. Joe had that effect on me, and I'm certain I'm not alone.

Remarkably my "tank commander" has still stayed with me all these years. He has survived at least 15 moves, five states, adolescence, innumerable toy boxes, and thousands of other "superior" toys. Right now he's safely ensconced in my bedroom with cracked knees, wobbly voice, box, and all. And there is where I'm certain he'll stay protected for many more years to come.

Remember, only *G.I. Joe* is G.I. Joe.



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Thanks gang! To everyone else, thanks for your support, and we look forward to bringing you more Joe goodness!

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