**Can you believe bubbles made Toy Hall of Fame?**

**By Carolyn Thompson** *| Associated Press*

It's mission accomplished for little green army men.

The molded plastic pretend soldiers have been inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame along with the 1980s stumper Rubik's Cube, and soap bubbles.

The trio of toys takes its place alongside other classics including Barbie, G.I. Joe, Scrabble and the hula hoop. They beat out nine other finalists including Fisher-Price Little People, American Girl dolls and My Little Pony.

The tiny green army pieces have been around since 1938. Their popularity waned during the Vietnam War but they became big-screen stars with the 1995 Pixar movie "Toy Story" and several manufacturers continue to produce millions of them every year.

"Over the years, these toys have remained popular because they are lightweight, simple to transport in buckets or pails, fun to blow up, easy to replace," said curator Patricia Hogan, who noted how some were inevitably melted under a magnifying glass in the sun. "But most of all because they inspire open-ended play."

The army men were finalists two other years before making the cut this time around, offering hope to this year's runners- up. Those include Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Slip 'N Slide, the skill game Operation, paper airplanes, pots and pans, and the toy trucks sold annually since 1964 by the Hess gas station chain.

The brain-teasing Rubik's Cube was invented by Hungarian architect Erno Rubik in the 1970s. It became popular in the United States in 1980 after being imported by Ideal Toy Corp. More than 100 million of the six-color cubes were sold between 1980 and 1982, dividing an obsessively twisting populace between those who could solve it and those who could not.

The cubes, with nine colored squares on each side, can be arranged 43 quintillion ways, according to the Toy Hall of Fame. They have inspired organized competitions in more than 50 countries, along with contests to solve it blindfolded, one-handed and under water. Mats Valk of the Netherlands holds the speed record for re-aligning the colors in 5.55 seconds.

Children have played with soap bubbles since at least the 17th century, according to the toy hall, when paintings depicting the play appeared in what is now modern-day Belgium. Now, more than 200 million bottles of bubble liquid are sold annually.

Bubbles got the nod as a toy of the imagination, spokesman Shane Rhinewald said, listing it alongside similar previous inductees including the stick and blanket.

Hogan, who curates the toy hall inside The Strong museum in Rochester, New York, noted the staying power of the decidedly low-tech toys in this year's class. The simpler the toy, the more ways children find to use them.

"The toys that do all the laughing or singing or moving for you don't offer the child as much room to use his imagination," she said.

A national selection committee made up of 24 experts, including toy collectors, designers and psychologists vote the winners in to the hall each year. Anyone can nominate a toy, but to make it through the preliminary selection process and become a finalist a toy must have achieved icon status, survived through generations, foster learning, creativity or discovery and have profoundly changed play or toy design.

"All kinds of stuff gets nominated," curator Nicolas Ricketts said. "People have nominated dirt, sofa cushions. Anything that someone has played with and had a good time with might end up being nominated."

*- Posted on November 12, 2014*