



Top left: ACW diorama featuring figures, scenic items and buildings made by Frontline.

Above left: Inspired by America's Colonial Williamsburg, Va., Frontline's Colonial Classics range introduced its figures with matt finishes.

Left: Gerard Prime and Jeni Foster talk toy soldiers in front of the Sally B bomber at Duxford.

Below left: Some of Granddad Minson's original toy soldier molds.

Bottom left: These Confederates were one of the first three sets of ACW figures produced by Frontline.

a number of interests in common such as wargaming with 25-mm figures in their youth. Both were and still are fascinated by military history. They struck up a strong and lasting friendship that is not dependent on their working relationship.

LAUNCHING FRONTLINE

During the Thatcher years of the 1980s Hong Kong suffered quite badly with a weak economy and poor property prices. The firm Howard and Gerard were working for had to lose a number of staff members. The two men took the opportunity to set up on their own in 1983.

Frontline Figures was established in Hong Kong toward the end of 1984. Gerard and Howard fell into making toy soldiers more by accident than by design.

They had nearly completed a project for a company located on the floor above Andy C. Neilson of King & Country Ltd. They were looking around for new business when the gentleman they were working for suggested that Andy might have something for them.

Initially, they were contracted to create dioramas for K&C. But when Andy set up his shop in Hong Kong, he asked Gerard and Howard if they might have a go at making some soldiers. They agreed and supplied on a sale-or-return basis for a while until, for a variety of reasons, the two companies decided to go their own ways.

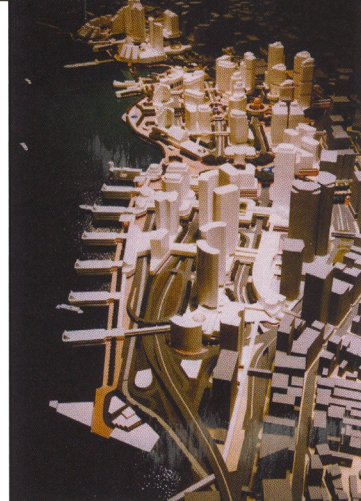
Gerard and Howard returned to making architectural models for a time. However, they found themselves still making soldiers when they could fit it in.

After their figures won the grand prize at the Chicago Model Expo in 1989, Gerard and Howard realized that just maybe toy soldier making was something they are quite good at. They decided to give it a go, making a more serious business out of their toy soldiers.

Aren't we collectors glad they did!?!

RELATIONSHIPS & RIVALRY

Through the years Howard and Gerard have formed a very good working relationship, and they have some interesting stories to tell.



Above: Howard Swales and Gerard Prime's architectural model of the planned reclamation of Hong Kong as visualized about 10 years ago.



Above: Freight containers at a harbor feature in an 8-foot square example of architectural model making by Gerard Prime and Howard Swales, the partners behind Frontline.

For example, the last model they made was for the Mandarin Hotel in Macao. It commissioned them to produce a life-size model of a 1930s Mercedes racing car to be suspended from the hotel ceiling in conjunction with the Grand Prix.

But the display model was so realistic that when it arrived at customs in Macao, officials impounded it for not having appropriate paperwork for a racing car. With the Grand Prix taking place soon, it was difficult to convince customs officials that the "car" was in fact a fake. One glance under the bonnet soon put them right!

Many people know of the rivalry between King & Country and Frontline Figures dating back to when Andy, Howard and Gerard collaborated. Although, in some respects the two companies are very similar, on closer inspection they are quite different and cater for different needs of the market.