

Having a father who was an architect with his own practice, Gerard had always been fully aware of the importance of scale and accuracy, and the relationship of physical objects in three-dimensional space.

Therefore, when the partners decided to create their own range of collectibles of various periods, their main concern was that all figures and horses would be totally correct dimensionally and anatomically, and to perfect scale and detail. If a person was to be depicted in an awkward pose, then it would be a pose that the human body could adopt, not one that the sculptor wished.

Research into uniforms, standards and regimental colours required much study, and visits to see originals in the United Kingdom and on the Continent. Such visits were sometimes undertaken by Bobby and Harold, and much enjoyed by them!

British Army regiments' historians were always approached to make as sure as possible that uniforms as well as Union and regimental colours were correct for the period depicted. The Frontline partners found that without exception the officers in charge of regimental archives were most helpful with their time and information.

K&C often has more limited production runs. It also utilizes some special poses or props, creating small scenes as opposed to entire battlefields.

Frontline avoids using props with its figures so, as Gerard puts it, "A diorama of figures can be set up for a battle scene without having an entire line of soldiers each with one foot on a log."

Frontline suits smaller budgets because figures are rarely discontinued, so people feel comfortable buying a couple at a time, according to Gerard.

MATT FINISH EMERGES

Rumors and speculation have arisen over the coincidental timing of Frontline and K&C both introducing matt-finish ranges. Some believe it to be deliberate; some pure coincidence; with Gerard holding the latter opinion.

He relates that the choice to use a matt finish happened more or less spontaneously as Frontline Figures was producing a range aimed specifically at the tourist market

in the United States as opposed to traditional toy soldier enthusiasts. Understandably, this caused Howard and Gerard to reassess their product in light of a different type of buyer.

An American friend from Colonial Williamsburg, Va., had suggested that Frontline should create figures that would appeal to tourists. A Colonial Classics range of civilians was introduced with a matt finish and greater detail that were more in keeping with the historic village's theme and tourist trade.

The new painting style proved extremely successful. It gradually began to be introduced into the other ranges of Frontline products, starting with Crimean War figures.

Around 1996, Frontline decided to introduce an American Civil War range made a little differently from everyone else.

Gerard notes that many manufacturers have started their ACW ranges with the Union Army in blue, then simply paint the same figures gray to create Confederates. Frontline deliberately made the Confederates first, and in such a way that they could not be repainted to become the opposition.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Frontline is now an extremely successful business featuring Chinese-made toy soldiers for a wide variety of historical eras.

It has been producing knights in armor for Altaya, a Spanish publishing house which packages them with magazines sold on a weekly basis. Under its contract, Frontline cannot sell these popular part works figures itself in Europe. However, they are available from the maker's agents in the United States and Canada, and have been doing quite well.

In the near future Gerard and Howard hope to concentrate on improving and creating figures in their Napoleonic and Zulu War ranges. One possibility being considered is special sets of casualty figures.

Marking its 20th anniversary in 2004, Frontline has released some fantastic new figures with more impending. Plans include an eight-figure, limited edition anniversary set of World War I soldiers on a resin base



Top right: Battle scene featuring Zulus and British troops made by Frontline.

Above right: Special items created by Frontline for Zulu War action.

Right: The last big model Howard Swales and Gerard Prime made was a life-size replica of a 1930s Mercedes racing car for a Grand Prix display at the Mandarin Hotel in Macao.

Below right: One of Frontline's latest Napoleonic releases is this Russian howitzer and crew.

re-creating the scene in none other than Frontline's own logo.

Frontline Figures is now a well-known and well-established manufacturer, and a force to be reckoned with. Congratulations on 20 years and best wishes for many more successful years to come. ■



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more, visit the manufacturer's Website at www.frontline-figures.com. It includes a list of suppliers around the globe.

E-mail inquiries can be directed to gerard@NO-SPAMnetvigator.com.

The mailing address is Frontline Figures, 14th Floor, Unit C, Derrick Industrial Building, 49-51 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong.