

BATTLEGAMES SPECIAL FEATURE WITH ISSUE 22

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This is the transcription of the conversation with Michael and Alan Perry that took place in Nottingham, 6th December 2009.

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HH: My thanks to Michael, who has graciously invited me into his home here in central Nottingham, where we have also been joined by his twin brother Alan, who lives just a couple of hundred yards down the road! So, let's get started. We're almost exactly the same age – born within a couple of weeks of each other in 1961 – so what are your first memories of doing anything involving toy soldiers or wargaming?

MP: I think even before we ever bought, or were even aware of Airfix figures, we made little pipe-cleaner men.

AP: Yes, we drew faces on them with felt tip pens.

MP: We used to make lots of them! I seem to remember that we arranged them like armies, even before we were really conscious of different countries and their armies.

HH: So how old are we talking here?

AP: Oh, we must have been about four or five.

HH: Really? That's amazing! So where did you even get the idea for this?

MP: It might have been something that mum showed us, because she was very artistic, but I don't quite know what pipe cleaners were doing around the house in the first place, because nobody in the family smoked!

HH: I remember you used to be able to get them down the local post office or tobacconists in packets.

AP: Yes, white ones, with the wire running down the centre.

HH: So, you were making loads of these? How extraordinary!

MP: Yes, and we were using lots of Lego bricks to make buildings for them. There was definitely a military flavour about it.

HH: So this was inspired by what – films you'd seen, books you'd read?

AP: I suppose so, but you're almost at the limit of memory, really, so it's hard to say, but there was no military interest in the family at all.

HH: That's interesting. It rather confirms that theory which says that no matter what you do with boys, they will find a way of making military toys! So, having made these pipe-cleaner men, were you playing games with them?

MP: No, not really, I don't think, we'd just arrange them in rows which kind of indicated fighting, but soon after this we got into Airfix.

HH: So, this would have been the mid- to late-60s? Can you remember what your first Airfix purchases were?

AP: I remember lots of American Civil War figures...

MP:...but I think the very first ones were the Guards, because we had the band.

AP: Yes, you might be right.

MP: Because we had the marching unit in red plastic.

AP: Yes, those might have been the very first ones. In fact, weren't they the very first ones that came out?

HH: They were, though I never got them myself, along with the Robin Hood set.

MP: And then we had the astronauts in white plastic.

HH: I'd forgotten those completely!

MP: And the Tarzan set! So it wasn't just military stuff we were interested in, it was anything that came out of Airfix, figure-wise, and we bought kits, like the aircraft and tanks, in fact pretty much everything that they did.

AP: Yes, that's right.

HH: Same here, I remember making the Apollo lander, and HMS Endeavour, HMS Victory and all those other kits. Mind you, the ships were right b*stards to make!

AP: Yes, they were! Actually, we did build quite a few of them, because our big brother rigged them, being slightly older, and then when we moved house, they were all covered in dust, so we shot them with air rifles at the bottom of the garden!

HH: [Laughs] Yes, I can remember doing that too!

MP: It was great, because you'd get a puff of dust when the pellets hit them, like smoke, and you'd get holes in the sails like cannonballs had made them.

HH: Dear, oh, dear, we've had appallingly similar childhoods! That was also the fate of many of my Tamiya tanks.

MP: I can remember even at the time when we were buying the Airfix figures, wondering why Airfix didn't make them in the hard plastic, like their kits. Initially, we didn't paint them, but then we started to fairly soon afterwards, and of course as soon as you started moving the figures around, the paint started to peel off, and that was very annoying.

HH: Yes, because in those days, the potential solution already existed – slopping a coat of PVA on them first – but nobody knew about it. All those flaking Humbrols.

AP: Yes, the technology, so to speak, already existed, but as you say, no one knew about it.

MP: I think it probably was in the Airfix magazine, but we never got that. Aly Morrison says he used to do that, and used banana oil, but we never tried it.

HH: Ah! The mythical banana oil! Me neither. Airfix magazine used to show you how to do conversions, cut and pin heads, make blanket rolls out of Plasticine, and then you were supposed to coat it with this amazing banana oil to set or harden the Plasticine.

AP: [Laughs] Oh, is that what it's for?

HH: It may have had a secondary effect of giving extra adhesion to the enamel paints we used at the time.

MP: Well, we never fathomed that one, and we never tried it.

HH: Anyway, I assume that by this time, you'd abandoned your pipe-cleaner armies?

MP: Yes, once we'd discovered Airfix, and of course there was slightly more detail on the figures as well – you can tell what they are!

HH: [Laughs] Yes, it's a shame, but I don't suppose you've got any pictures of your pipe-cleaner men for the archives, have you?

AP: No, sorry to disappoint you.

HH: So, by this point, you were building up your collection of Airfix stuff, but still not playing any kind of formal games with them?

AP: Well, we were playing games, but not with any kind of existing rules, or hardly any rules.

MP: No, we used to do dioramas with the figures. We used one of our beds, with a Subbuteo pitch upside down on top, with some humps and bumps made underneath, with the figures nicely arranged, and then shove the bed and see which ones stayed up! Not really a game, but anyway, then we progressed to elastic bands which we used to shoot at them.

HH: Did you have the Britain's toy cannons at all?

MP: No, we didn't see those until much later, when somebody else introduced us to them, but by that stage, we had started to get onto a different level.

HH: I have early memories of rolling marbles on the carpet at my figures, and those things called fivestones which looked like tank traps – I never actually worked out how you were supposed to play the proper fivestones game with them!

(Alan and Michael then gave the editor a description of the rules of fivestones and enlightenment duly ensued)

HH: Well, thanks for that, but I always found they were a wonderfully random weapon to roll at your troops, because you could never quite tell where they were going to hit. Who needs dice?!

MP: We did used to do set-ups in the garden as well. When fireworks day used to come round, we'd make tanks explode. It was very pyrotechnic! We used a lot of lighter fuel to great effect too! I'm sure a lot of other boys were doing the same.

HH: [Laughs] I remember those cans of 3-in-1 oil with a spout. It used to make awful black smoke, but it was quite good for a burning tank!

MP: We also had little aerosols, because I used to have hay fever, and the little cans were for the inhalers, and I remember we put one inside a Tamiya tank and heated it up. The tanks was still fairly intact by the time the aerosol exploded. It was a Panzer IV, and we never actually found the turret afterwards – it went straight up in the air and disappeared, an amazing explosion!

HH: [Laughing] Fantastic! We were obviously little boys doing the same things at the same time! I remember making trench systems in the garden, and sacrificing Airfix miniatures. In fact, I became quite a marksman with an air rifle, shooting 1/76 scale Afrika Korps and 8th Army figures. I recall there was a series on TV, back in the late 1960s or early 1970s, called something like "The Desert

Rats”, based on the SAS Long Range Desert Group. That really inspired me to do stuff to do with the desert war, building Panzer IIIs and IVs which Airfix was producing by that time. So, in the summer, when the soil had dried that pale, desert-like yellow, that was ideal for making bunkers and hideouts. And then, of course, there was the obligatory fuel dump explosion at the end!

AP: [Laughs] Yes! We used to do that sort of thing, using a lot of matches, lighter fuel and gunpowder.

HH: Okay, enough pyromania, what was the first time you can remember discovering wargaming as a formal game, with rules and dice and tape measures?

AP: We did start making our own rules up, I think the first thing we did was pirate games.

MP: Generally, we had small kind of skirmish games, when we started off, sci-fi, fantasy, pirates and, sometimes, ‘historical’ military ones, but it was always a different set of rules every week, just something that we made up as we went along. We played with a boy called Mark, a friend of ours, and every week we would go down to his house and play a different game.

HH: So, were these inspired by things you’d seen on the telly, or in comics, or...?

AP: No, we weren’t really into comics. Apart from *Look & Learn*.

MP: Yes, *Look & Learn* was our favourite.

HH: Yes, weren’t they fabulous? You can find lots of them online now.

MP: Really?

HH: Yes, they’re at www.lookandlearn.com, a huge archive of all that fabulous artwork. Anyway, going back to what you said about pirates, all the movies that I can remember from the time were probably Errol Flynn stuff.

AP: Yes, in black and white.

MP: We probably were inspired by what we’d seen on television...

AP: ...but only unconsciously, I suppose. It didn’t make us go straight out and do it, so to speak.

HH: So, when did you decide that you wanted to start making your own miniatures?

MP: We didn’t do much in the way of conversion work on Airfix figures, really, we mainly just painted them. We were very keen. I remember when we were buying Airfix figures, I had a dream, because I was really fired up by them, and I woke up in the morning and said to Alan, “I’ve just had this amazing dream, and you could buy any period you wanted.” We had the Blandford book on military uniforms, and we used to go through that on a regular basis, and we always wanted to ‘convert’ by painting, such as changing the American War of Independence figures for some other obscure 18th century war.

HH: So, how old were you when you had that dream?

MP: Oh, I suppose early teens, maybe 13 or 14?

HH: So, quite early on?

MP: Yes, but at that point, it was just an amazing dream, I remembered it when I woke up and it made a big impression – I’ve remembered it ever since!

HH: But, by this time as you’ve already mentioned in passing, you were getting interested in military history. When did that start?

MP: We used to go down to Rupert's to play wargames, or Mark's, and use that book as reference.

AP: Yes, Rupert is probably our oldest mate, going back to infants' school, when we were about six. And we still know him now.

MP: We always used to play 'war' games with sticks, running round the park.

AP: And usually, we used to take the Blandford book along, close your eyes and then open it at a random page, and that was the war you were going to do that day. But you'd always end up with the same sticks!

HH: [Laughs] So, this was you playing at being soldiers?

AP: Yes, except we would be Seven Years War Austrians and Prussians.

HH: Fantastic!

MP: We kind of knew that because our stick was a muzzle-loader, you'd have to spend time loading, or at other times you'd be using repeaters!

AP: Those were literal, sort of physical wargames!

HH: Again, that brings back memories for me too, because that was something I used to do. In fact, I started a little group at school, called the "Shoeburyness Western Battalion" because I had a red arm patch from my grandfather on it which said SWB. I only later discovered that it was actually from the South Wales Borderers! And we went to army surplus stores, where you could get quite a bit of kit – oh, yes, it all got quite serious! We had log books and all sorts of stuff to keep records.

MP: Oh, we just had sticks!

HH: Well, we started off with sticks, and then we discovered Sekiden pellet guns.

AP & MP: Ah! Yes!

HH: They fired those little brass-coloured balls, a whole pile of them went in the chamber and then Bang! Bang! Bang! And of course we had cap guns too.

AP: And don't forget spud guns!

HH: Yes! Spud guns! I could never find a nice, big, decent one, though, they were always tiny little things. They were fired by a cap, weren't they?

MP: That's right, and then there were the exceptionally loud 'ring' caps, which were far better to fire your spud bits!

HH: I always loved the smell of caps, like the smell of cordite. "I love the smell of caps in the morning, it smells like victory!"

[All laugh]

HH: So, that's a fascinating parallel that we've uncovered, that we were all running around in the woods like this, but I love this notion that when you went out to play, it was always "Okay, so which war are we going to fight today?" For me, it was always WWII.

AP & MP: Oooh, no!

MP: That was too boring for us, I think.

HH: So that Blandford was kind of your bible?

AP: It was, actually, at the time.

HH: Do you remember buying or reading any other books from that time, to do with military history?

MP: Well, at school, they had a large number in the library, in the military section.

AP: I think there used to be one particular big, thick book, wasn't there? A big coffee table sort of book on great battles. And it had amazing pictures in there, lovely paintings, and that inspired us quite a bit.

HH: I had the naval book that I think was a companion to that, *Great Sea Battles* by Oliver Warner. My interest never really developed, but I became quite fascinated by Nelson, and the Glorious Fourth of June, and all that age of sail stuff, naval battles from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In fact, I've still got that book. And do you remember the Jackdaw Folders?

AP: No, I don't remember those.

HH: Basically, they were a card folder or envelope thing, and inside there were facsimile reproductions of letters from wars, documents and so on.

AP: Ah, yes! I know them, but I've only seen them quite recently.

HH: Blimey, I remember them back in the mid-1960s.

MP: Yes, I remember early ones.

HH: I got my first one when I was definitely still at junior school. I think I had one on Waterloo, but I lost that somewhere, but I've still got my one on Trafalgar. It's quite surprisingly interesting. They've reproduced the map of the Battle of Trafalgar, with all the names of the ships marked on it, and the sheet of flags for the famous "England expects..." signal and so on. So that was definitely an inspiration for me, as was the school library.

MP: Yes, that's where we spent at least an hour every week in there. We always went straight to the military section.

HH: There was a teacher who was also a wargamer, so he made sure that they got in some of the early Don Featherstone and Terry Wise's *Introduction to Battle Gaming*. Did you have a good local library as well?

AP: Yes, there was one where we were in Palmer's Green in London.

HH: Our local one in Southend must have had a wargaming librarian, because it had a big section where I found Charles Grant's *The War Game*.

MP: No, we never saw any of the books by those big names in early wargaming until much later, probably the mid-80s I suppose.

HH: And as for uniform books, I remember there was a series called Almark. Did you see those?

AP: No, we didn't really have any of those locally.

MP: Not for a long time. I remember that we did quite a lot of work with Historex figures, and I can't remember where the reference came from, though it was probably Blandford again. I think that once we had found that first, single volume, which we'd had for quite a long time, we went back to Blandford again.

HH: Yes, they were certainly reliable, and they were lovely little books in themselves. I'm trying to remember who else was around at the time in military reference publishing, and of course there were the Funckens.

MP: Yes, that's right, and it was always a big event when a new Funcken book had turned up, and I remember when the Lace Wars book arrived. They were – and are – lovely books, but we never really got inspired by the 18th century from them.

HH: No, me either, for some reason. For me, the eighteenth century inspiration came from Charles Grant's *The War Game*. My dad died in 1971, when I was only ten, and that was the same year that *The War Game* was published, and I found that on the shelves not long after my dad had died and, because of the way that Charles Grant wrote, he was very avuncular, and I found it very comforting to read. And I think that's also why, for me, it became so deeply engrained, because I was at a time of my life when I was very emotionally sensitive, it sunk in very deep with me. And the way he wrote about the eighteenth century just made it hugely appealing, more appealing even than the Napoleonic Wars. But someone writing something in the right way, at the right time was just so powerful. And of course, I also loved the fictitious countries, which was great fun. So that's where my wargaming roots really took hold. But going back to the uniform reference thing, I don't think there was a huge amount around at the time. I think that nowadays, we kind of take things for granted, because you can pick up an Osprey on just about anything.

MP: Yes, you're right. I suppose we were a bit restricted. There was the school library and the public library, but we didn't really have any bookshops nearby, not for a long time.

HH: Also, proper uniform reference works were comparatively expensive at the time. Pocket money was limited, and it could maybe stretch to a box or two of Airfix figures if you were lucky, or an Airfix kit, but uniform books were in the Pounds, rather than Shillings. But anyway, coming back on track, you were doing this stuff out in the woods, with your Blandford books, but were you artistically talented at school, were you encouraged to pursue stuff?

AP & MP: Yes, sure.

AP: We were always encouraged at home, and at school as well.

MP: Well initially we were painting, rather than sculpting.

AP: We played with Plasticine. And we used to do a lot of pictures of battles, all the time in fact.

HH: You said your mum was talented, artistically? So you had that home encouragement as well? Because there are obviously a lot of people who were made to pursue more academic stuff, whose parents frowned upon what might be seen as more frivolous creative pursuits.

MP: Well, our dad encouraged us too. He was a good carpenter, in fact he made that cabinet in the corner over there, and mum was a fairly good artist.

AP: She'd laugh to hear you say that, though.

MP: But she was very good. She was a housewife, but before that she had been a dressmaker.

HH: So she was a creative person?

MP: Oh, yes, certainly.

HH: And what did your dad do for a living?

AP: He was an electrician, an electrical contractor. He started up his own business.

HH: But he obviously had a creative bent?

AP: Certainly for carpentry, yes.

HH: That's interesting, because my dad was a hobby carpenter as well, not professionally, but he liked to carve and make things.

MP: Actually, just after the war, he was going to go into carpentry, but they told him that was a dying business, and to go into being an electrician instead, because that's what everyone is going to want.

HH: So what was his background? What did he do in the war?

MP: He was just a kid during the war years.

AP: He looked after an allotment!

MP: I suppose it would have been in about 1948 or '49 that he did his National Service in the RAF as Ground Crew.

HH: So obviously your dad would have been a bit younger than my dad, then, because my dad served in the Fleet Air Arm.

AP: Oh, right; yes, he was too young for that. I don't think they would have put him in at thirteen or fourteen – a bit too early!

HH: [Laughs] Probably not! Anyway, so you had a family that didn't frown upon, in fact encouraged your creative instincts, and it was encouraged at school, was it?

MP: Definitely at junior school, we were always encouraged, and in senior school, when we were toying with the idea of going to Art College, something we were quite looking forward to, our teacher at the time said "Don't do it, because it will restrict your ideas," so we took their advice.

HH: So, what senior school did you end up at?

MP: Winchmore Hill, the local comprehensive school.

HH: So you did the normal GCSEs and CSEs, and then at what age did you leave? After A-Levels?

AP: Yes, but we started to work for Games Workshop, making figures, during the last year that we were still at school. We were occasionally in class, making figures on a freelance basis.

HH: So this is a fairly critical point in your development! So, at what stage had you started making your own figures?

MP: I think by fifteen. We used to paint figures for a shop called Michaels Models up in Finchley. We used to travel up there every Saturday on a bus with a mate of ours, and they had 54mm and 90mm figures in the cabinets, and we took a painted figure in there once, and we used to buy Minifigs, and we took it in turns painting figures and working behind the counter. Steve Attwood suggested that we...

AP: ...make our own.

MP: Well, he made his own out of Plasticard, layers and layers of Plasticard. But he told us that there was this new stuff that some people used called Milliput, and that we might want to try it out. Before then, we were using wood filler.

AP: Yes, plastic wood.

HH: The brown stuff?

MP: Yes, we made a few 54mm-ish figures, which were awful. Then he introduced us to Milliput, and the first couple of figures we made just sagged, we couldn't understand quite what was going on, but we hadn't realised that you need an armature inside! So Steve told us that if we put wire inside, that might hold it up.

HH: So this would have been in about 1978-ish? Wow! So what had prompted you to want to do your own figures?

MP: By that stage, we were painting metal 54mm figures, and Historex, and buying occasional metal figures from Michaels Models, and buying loads of Minifigs stuff, but we weren't properly wargaming as yet.

HH: Can you remember when you first discovered Minifigs? Those were the days when Minifigs was the biggest company, of course.

AP: I think the first figures I can remember buying were when we went to Turnpike Lane, but the first figure that we bought one of was actually Hinchliffe. Uncle Derek actually bought one between us.

MP: Oh, yes, it was a Hinchliffe Polish Lancer. And we were gobsmacked by it...

AP: ...by the detail and animation!

HH: Sculpted by the legendary Peter Gilder, of course.

AP: But because Michaels Models had the full Minifigs range in Finchley, we got used to them and actually felt they had more believable poses as well. A lot of them were painted up...

HH: ...which always makes a difference...

AP: ...and that's what really got me into collecting them.

MP: We were kind of collecting 25mm figures, not armies of them, though it was always nice to have at least six figures doing the same thing, but never armies. But at the same time we were making large-scale figures, for ourselves and for our local British Model Soldier Society group, and entering them into competitions. So this was all about the same kind of time. We ended up going more into wargaming than the bigger scale stuff eventually, because we were taken on by Games Workshop. That's because a shop opened up next to Michaels Models, in North Finchley, just selling purely fantasy games and role-play games, and in about 1978 we heard that Games Workshop were looking for people to design figures for them, and we thought "Oooh, we could do that!", so we knocked out a few figures fairly quickly.

HH: I love the way you just say "Oooh, we could do that!" It takes a certain level of confidence!

MP: But don't forget that by that stage, we had been making the big figures, 90mm and 54mm, but we hadn't really done anything at wargames size before, but we thought it shouldn't be a problem.

HH: So, by this time you had developed techniques using Milliput? And that was courtesy of Michaels Models, who had introduced you to that? And this just unleashed a different avenue of creativity for you?

MP: It meant you could get more detail on the figure, and the putty would go where you wanted it to more, and stay there! And it would set hard, unlike Plasticine, which we did experiment with.

HH: But nothing that you had been doing up to this point had actually been cast? You were just making individual models?

MP: Yes, that's right, up until we joined Games Workshop.

HH: So, Games Workshop was the first time that something you had created was taken and then they churned out 100,000 of them?

AP: Yes, it was always exciting.

MP: I think what was really exciting was that they used to sell them in little plastic bags with a card and staple at the top, and we used to have our names underneath the logo, it always said who had sculpted them, so that was very exciting when the first range was coming out, we couldn't believe it. But I think it was just a year or so later that they gave up on the name thing,

HH: Right, there was so much happening at this time, when you've moved so quickly from being a couple of lads at school doing your A-Levels, and doing a few bits and bobs in your spare time, to discovering Milliput and you start creating stuff in larger scales, which was what, Napoleonic stuff?

AP: Well, any historical period, really.

MP: And fantasy. But not really any sci-fi.

HH: So, what really got you interested in creating anything to do with fantasy? Had you read *Lord of the Rings*?

MP: No, I had read *The Hobbit*, but that hadn't really inspired me to sculpt, it was mainly the work of Frank Frazetta that we saw first. Generally, it was artwork that I found interesting. I don't think we ever copied it as such.

AP: No, we didn't really copy anything we saw in illustrations, but we got inspired by it and then made up our own things. Because 90mm were quite big figures, really, and you could do a lot with them.

HH: So when it came to Games Workshop, who approached who?

MP: Steve at Michaels Models said that there was this new company setting up, go and speak to them next door, because that was the only way we had of contacting them, so we went round and they said sure, if we could make a couple of figures to show them, and they gave us the address in Dalling Road, Hammersmith, the first proper shop that Games Workshop had, with the studio above for *White Dwarf*. So I think we made about a dozen, actually, very crude little things.

HH: Can you remember what they were?

AP: Yes, goblins, and a giant tusker, a bit like a rhino without the horn.

MP: So we took all those in, and they said yes, and they took them, and paid for them, and asked if we'd like to do some more. I think they gave us a list and pretty much let us do what we wanted.

AP: So we worked freelance for them, and then as soon as we left school, they took us on full time.

HH: So the first figures you did for them in 28mm, you handed them over and they said they were all right, then? So you were obviously doing the right kind of stuff!

MP: Perhaps we were just cheap! I think at that time we were paid £3 an hour, which was amazing for us, because we were doing a paper round at £1.20 a week, and all of a sudden to get £3 an hour... And at the time, we were making these crude little figures in about five hours, and so basically it was £15 per figure. So, in the late 1970s, that seemed like quite a lot of money!

HH: Exactly, and particularly as a school-leaver, you were doing something that you loved doing, it's not like you were working at a lathe or down a mine.

AP: I remember that Steve Jackson and Iain Livingstone were running it at the time, and we used to take the figures to them, and they used to look at them and say “Oooh, I don’t think you spent five hours doing that!”, and we said “Oh yes we did!”, and they were always trying to knock a few pounds off if possible!

HH: So, did they give you a brief at all?

MP: Not to start with. For the first few months, they left it up to ourselves. And they did get to produce those first things that we took in, including that tusker model, which was made with Milliput with a Plasticine core. I didn’t mention it to them, because I didn’t know how moulding worked, so this went off to Citadel up in Newark where they’d just started setting up the casting up there, and Bryan Ansell was in charge, and I got an irate phone call saying “What have you put in this bl**dy tusker?” “Well,” I said, “it’s got Plasticine in the centre and Milliput around the outside.” “Never,” he said, “put Plasticine in it, make it solid – it just exploded in the mould!” Apparently, it was quite dangerous!

HH: [Loud laugh] Fantastic!

MP: So, we learned a little bit from that incident about how to mould things! But anyway, they sold them, and I made a new tusker, and they ended up being sold as some of the first things that we’d done, but of course there were a couple of other sculptors working before us there.

HH: So, you were producing lots of goblins, but what other ranges did you work on?

AP: The first proper ranges were the Adventurers, once they had really nailed down what it was they wanted, and I think we did some illustration as well.

HH: So can you remember what other ranges from that time might have influenced you? You have already mentioned Hinchliffe and Minifigs.

AP: And we liked Garrison too.

HH: Greenwood & Ball?

MP: We didn’t really like them that much. We liked Garrison, but they are a bit weird, their heights and shapes varied too much. And we always felt sorry for the Hinchliffe horses that looked like their legs were broken in several places.

HH: I think with Hinchliffe, you either love them or hate them – they were very vivacious.

MP: It was more difficult for us to get to the shop that sold Hinchliffe than it was for us to get to North Finchley with all the Minifigs, and I think they were also a little bit cheaper than Hinchliffe at the time.

AP: We occasionally bought a Hinchliffe figure, and there were some very nice ones.

HH: Now, I think back to that time when I first became a professional graphic designer, and there’s that moment when you suddenly think, Oh my goodness, someone’s actually paying me for this, which also means that they can say that they don’t like it, or reject something. Do you remember ever having some kind of nervousness about that, or was it just the sheer confidence of youth that carried you past it?

MP: [Laughs] I think it was, I don’t think we cared at all.

AP: I don’t remember ever having any rejected at all.

MP: I think they took generally what we gave them.

HH: Looking back now, do you feel that they were pretty accomplished actually, or do you look back now and think, “Aw, goodness, that was a bit rubbish.”

AP: Oh, all the time! Any of our old figures are pretty awful. Even if it’s only a month old, you think “I could have done that better”.

HH: Can you remember feeling particularly challenged by anything in particular?

MP: We quite enjoy a challenge. I don’t think there’s anything that particularly fazed us. If it’s something a bit more complicated, or animals, we quite enjoy making them, and horses, I really like doing them as well.

HH: that’s interesting, because so many sculptors can do a beautiful human figure, but get them to try and sculpt a horse and it all goes to pieces.

AP: They are quite tricky things.

HH: It’s one of those things that you know immediately when it looks wrong, but you can’t quite say what makes something right. You guys do beautiful horses, which I think is one of the great strengths across your range, but it’s not that common.

MP: They always take a while to do, and can sometimes seem to take ages, and it is a matter of getting the proportions right, the length of the body compared to the height of the legs, which makes a square, a box, from the top of its shoulder to the back of its hindquarters to the tip of its hooves, and some people don’t seem to have understood that. That is the way to do it, and then you can get the right proportions for the head and so on.

HH: Were you working just from your imagination all the time, or from life, or from drawings or paintings when you were sculpting? Because you didn’t go to art college, but did you do any life drawing classes, or anything like that?

MP & AP: No.

HH: So this has all just been trial and error?

AP: Yes.

HH: That’s pretty extraordinary, guys, I’ve got to tell you!

MP: I suppose the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Obviously, there were an awful lot of very strange looking figures earlier on – and still are, sometimes! [Alan laughs] But I suppose the number of thousands of figures we’ve got through, I think we roughly know how to do a human in most positions you can imagine, and then hundreds of horses too.

HH: Yesterday, round at Alan’s place, he said “Oh yes, this is how you make an armature,” and went [gesturing with fingers as if holding wire and pliers] yik-yik-yik-yik-yik-yik and I could see he’d made precisely the right proportions for a little tiny human being. (*See photos in article.*) And nothing had been measured, and even Steve [Stephen May of Immortal Miniatures] who was sitting there with me said “Blimey, I have to get out my measure and check this proportion and that proportion and so on”.

AP: The swivel point of the hips is about halfway down the body, and your knee is about halfway down from that, so that gives you the basic blocks.

MP: And of course you can generally compare it to a figure that you’ve made before, a constant figure which is standing upright, so you’re measuring against something that you’ve done before.

HH: The proportion of your figures is about six to seven head lengths? When you see a painting, it's technically supposed to be about eight head lengths?

MP: Yes, it's not perfect, I think it's supposed to be about seven and a half heads in a body, but if you did that on a figure, you're going to have to scale everything else down as well to the correct scale, including weapons and plumes and bayonets and things, and you wouldn't be able to cast it.

HH: This is an interesting technical aspect, then, your understanding of how the process of casting works leads you to sculpt in a particular way.

AP: Yes.

MP: With plastic figures you can get away with a little bit more finesse on the fineness of the weapons, you can make them a little bit more in scale, but even so, you can't quite go the whole way.

AP: And if you did, you couldn't get them to match the metal figures. You need to match them up. You're always compromising with metal and plastic, so that they look human enough but they can be moulded properly.

HH: But the thing is that they do look fine. When they look right, you don't even stop to think about it, but if something is out of kilter, you do find yourself looking and realising that something isn't quite right. But anyway, what I wanted to ask was that whilst we all know that you are twins, where do you think that you differ in your abilities or tastes?

MP: Well, obviously Alan is far more interested in Napoleonics. Whilst I am interested in the Napoleonic period, I'm far more interested in other, more obscure stuff.

AP: [Laughs] I like obscure too, I just like Napoleonics a lot!

MP: I mean really, I like anything military, in almost any period, but I suppose some periods are just a little bit more interesting to me, like nineteenth century colonial and European warfare. The eighteenth century for some reason, apart from the Marlburian period, doesn't really appeal a huge amount, and the Seven Years War never has, really, because it's such a big subject, and it's like dipping your toe into Napoleonics, where you find that everything interesting has already been done by so many other people.

HH: Though of course there are people like me who think it would be so wonderful if the Perrys did the Seven Years War!

AP: I think that logically, we like that period and the uniforms, but it is the enormity of the range that you would have to contemplate.

MP: You could spend the rest of your life doing the Seven Years War period.

AP: So it would be nice to do it at some point, but, you never know... Don't quote me on that! It's just a huge thing to start. You'd have to plan the whole thing out and how long it was going to take.

HH: So are you working together on these projects all the time, or do your skills develop differently at any point? It's just it seems to me all too easy for people to say, "Oh, they're twins, so they're identical, their abilities are the same," and so on, but of course you're not identical in so many respects, you're quite different people.

AP: Yes, hopefully.

MP: Anyway, I'm different!

HH: [Laughs] So anyway, I want to get past the cliché, and this is why I'm interested in where you feel that maybe you wanted to go off in different directions, and do something else.

MP: Yes, we do.

AP: Each range we do is normally independent.

MP: The only things we came together to do were the first bunch of plastics, the American Civil War, because we wanted to get through that fairly quickly, and obviously two people working on the same project does speed things up. So we did all the American Civil War between us, and the British Napoleonics and French Napoleonics plastics.

AP: But from now on, we'll be doing our own individual boxes of plastics, because that's usually what inspires us in any period. Whatever period you're doing, you've got to be inspired by doing it, it's not much fun if you're not particularly inspired by it.

HH: So, if I pick up two different Perry figures, is there something that you feel would give it a distinguishing feature that would make it an Alan figure or a Michael figure?

AP: Mine's obviously better than his.

MP: And mine's obviously better than Alan's! Go on, we can take a picture, you can place your money...

HH: [Laughs]

AP: I think that our styles are so similar, really.

MP: We have problems seeing figures that we made, say, ten years ago for Workshop and trying to figure out which one of us made it. We do occasionally come across one where we have to ask ourselves, "Well, did I do that, or did Alan do it?" So sometimes, we can't tell. But obviously, most of the time, Alan makes Napoleonics, and I make the colonial stuff.

AP: I make other things too!

MP: Yes, I know that, I'm just saying...

HH: [Laughs] He's resenting the Napoleonic brand!

MP: I'm just saying that mostly, I don't do any Napoleonics, apart from the plastic ones. Like Alan hasn't made any of the Wars of the Roses yet.

HH: When did you start getting involved in re-enactment?

MP: About 1980.

HH: And what was the first stuff you were involved in?

MP: The English Civil War Society. Rawdon's Regiment. We did that for about ten years.

HH: How did that come about, then?

AP: It was a friend of our brother's, Greg Stephens. He'd told our older brother to get us along, and that we would love it, because they knew we were interested in military history.

MP: It was a local event, wasn't it?

AP: Yes, and we went along just for an evening, just to meet him and so on, and they seemed like a very nice bunch of people, and we got sorted out for all our kit, and we got armour as well. It was one

of the few regiments that actually had armoured pikemen, and we had proper armour which was done very nicely.

HH: So, breastplate, tassets...?

MP: Yes, breastplate, back, and tassets and a morion, well, really a cabasset.

AP: Yes, a proper cabasset, rather than a stupid two-part one. So we were quite impressed by them and we joined.

MP: And we did it for ten years, up to about 1990, which was the last muster we attended. And by that stage, in about 1984, we had joined The White Company, which is fifteenth century re-enactment.

HH: Of high repute.

MP: Yes, at the time it certainly was. When we joined, there was only about twelve of us.

AP: Not even that, actually.

HH: The White Company was always famed for being very precise.

MP: Well, the idea was that everything should be right, incorporating the latest research on armour, clothing and so on.

AP: That was a nice, refreshing change from the English Civil War Society which was huge, and you got the massed battles which were great, but the detail in general wasn't that good.

MP: You'd get a lot of individuals who were really into getting it right, but 80% of the people were just there for the beer and the bash. Obviously, we enjoyed the beer and the bash too, but we did like trying to get it right as well, so when The White Company came along, we could see it was good people with similar interests.

HH: That's also revealing, what you've said there, about trying to get it right, because at some point, you had developed, for want of a better phrase, that wargamers' pedantry about the detail. Where do you see that as coming from as a personality trait, because it's something I ask myself quite often.

AP: It's usually not very hard to get it right.

MP: It's as easy to get it right as to get it wrong, and so why not try and get it right?

AP: It's laziness, really, if you don't.

HH: So, you'd set standards for yourself at some point? At some point, you'd made the decision that if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well?

MP: I think so, though I don't quite know when.

HH: It's a self-imposed quality control, isn't it? Perhaps it partly because you're working on miniatures, where you're working on minute detail?

MP: I think it's nice to know how clothing works, why does it hang like that, and so on.

AP: I suppose we were always critical of each other's work as well. If something isn't right, the other one will pick it up, and you don't want to be moaned at.

HH: I think that's a really important factor, because you're obviously very close, and you're working on very similar stuff, and you are looking over each other's shoulder all the time. Was there a form of competition between one another?

MP: Yes, sure.

HH: But the thing is, what I find interesting is that you don't come across, outwardly, as being extremely competitive.

MP: No, I think it's just probably completely subconscious. I don't think it's something that we ever think about, really.

HH: But because it's subconscious, it's hard for someone like me to work out how you've managed to achieve what you've achieved, to discover what's driven you forward, and it is obviously something to do with your relationship as brothers, working on similar things, where you've almost been each other's guardian in the trade, as it were, keeping an eye on what the other one is doing.

AP & MP: Yes, sure.

HH: But also, the fact that you've taken this deep interest in why cloth hangs the way it does, why is it that you can make certain things in metal and not others, and so on – that's really interesting to someone like me. But it's also the fact that you've kind of done it automatically, without it necessarily being a conscious process.

AP: No, I don't think it's ever been conscious.

MP: I mean obviously, it's always quite handy that having held weapons, if you have used them in combat or at least know how heavy they are, how much weight the figure should be showing...

AP: ...and the limitations of movement in armour, or even the non-limitations.

HH: You're probably familiar with the work of Mike Loades, are you?

MP & AP: Oh, yes.

HH: There was a famous video he did, where he was doing cartwheels in full armour.

AP: One of our mates could do that.

HH: I can't do cartwheels, even without armour!

MP: [Laughs] I certainly can't do it now!

AP: You never could, actually!

HH: So, for you, that was all part of the same journey; what you were doing in re-enactment informed your sculpting work.

MP: Yes, definitely, it really helps.

HH: So here you were, back in the early 1980s, getting involved with re-enactment, which was when you were starting out with Games Workshop as well, so do you remember there being a step-change in the quality of what you were producing?

MP: No! [Laughs]

HH: So was it a more gradual development?

AP: It was very gradual, I think.

MP: I think in general, we always hate whatever we have made a couple of weeks beforehand, so we were always trying to improve, so I think it's always just been a process of continual improvement.

HH: So you're obviously very self-critical of your work.

MP & AP: Yes, absolutely.

HH: I know what you mean, because I'm from the same mould there, I get in my own self-criticism before anyone else says anything!

AP: Oh yes!

HH: So, in what ways do you think you've improved? What do you look back at and think, "Oh, yes, that was a naïve way of doing things"?

MP: Anatomy.

AP: Proportions, getting the proportions more correct, which is something we always wanted to do. When we set up Perry Miniatures, we wanted the figures to look more human.

MP: The things we were making at Foundry were definitely bigger heads, bigger hands, chunkier weapons, and I think that stuck in our minds a bit.

HH: Anyway, let's wind right back a bit here, to when you went full-time sculpting with Citadel/Games Workshop in 1980. So were you working on the premises?

MP: No, we worked at home. By that time, mum and dad had moved to Gaffs Oak in Hertfordshire, and we worked in the back room there.

HH: So how did that work? Were you under contract to produce a certain number of figures?

MP: I think we got lists, and we worked through them, and every two weeks we drove up to Newark, which is where Citadel Miniatures was.

HH: Wasn't Duncan MacFarlane involved at that time?

MP: He was only there for a year, in about 1983 to '84, and then Brian Ansell disappeared for about a year and a half and then came back again. And it was at about that time that Alan made a giant for Citadel, and I made a large dragon.

HH: Which were featured in a recent *White Dwarf*. I seem to recall that they actually found one of your dragons. I've never seen one of them in the flesh.

MP: It's a big chicken of a dragon – it's certainly almost the size of a chicken! The wing span must be all of two feet. That was really fun to make, but talk about challenging things to make, I just jumped into it, but then realised that I had no idea how I was going to get this thing to cast! So ended up having to chop it up in all sorts of ways.

HH: It must have weighed about ten kilos!

MP: It is very heavy. You certainly need two hands to pick it up! But at the time, it sold for about £50, which was serious money back in those days, but they sold quite a few. But eventually, the moulds just gave out, so there weren't actually that many made.

HH: A truly limited edition.

MP: Yes, and the casters – Alan Merritt at the time, and Richard Halliwell – used to swear at me, because they had to clamp it together. And actually, putting it together was a pain in the *rse as well,

because Bryan Ansell said "Could you write out some instructions to go with it?" so I wrote down the things you'd need to go with it, including glue, and I wrote that you'd need a hammer too! And he said "We can't have that on there!" and he crossed it out. But you *did* need a hammer!

HH: [Laughs] So here you were now in Hertfordshire, beavering away in that room, churning out... Well, what were you producing mostly?

AP: Mostly Spacefarers, the precursors to Space Marines.

MP: Generally, just fantasy lines.

AP: But when Duncan took over in about 1982 or '83, he had the idea of doing historical figures, which we obviously jumped at, so we did all those Marlburians, early Romans...

MP: Horrendous figures when we look at them now, but obviously at the time it was very exciting. So, they were being sold very early on, actually.

HH: So, how did the Foundry thing come about?

MP: It was about 1985, because Bryan's dad had just retired, and he wanted something to do, and Bryan knew that we were very keen on historical figures, so he put two and two together, and he said to us that we could make historical ranges and his dad would run the company which Bryan owned.

AP: There were a couple of other people, Aly Morrison and Dave Gallagher, who joined later on, but there were a few other people interested in doing stuff as well, and because we were doing it in our own time, it just doubled the amount of pleasure for Bryan, I think!

HH: So you were working on a freelance basis?

MP: Yes, it was up to us how much work we did for it, but we were very eager to do it, and we were paid on a royalty basis. So we were doing that in our 'spare' time in the evenings, and doing work for Workshop during the day.

HH: Now, Rick Priestley wrote the first edition of *Warhammer* with Richard Halliwell in 1983, which had grown out of Bryan's idea of having a ruleset that used the races that were being produced as miniatures for Citadel. And then, of course, that took off.

AP: Yes, just a little bit!

MP: It seems to have done it!

HH: So it ballooned from that point onwards, and the company grew with it.

MP: Well, the company was already growing on a steep curve, but I don't think it quite reached its full potential, because Bryan was really keen to keep a tight rein on things, but then when he left in '92, it got even bigger and expanded rapidly.

HH: I'm interested in how you fit in here, because obviously, the company is reliant on people like you to produce stuff for it, so to what extent have you been involved with any of the business decision side of things, or have you always felt separate as creatives?

MP: They never ask us anything!

AP: We're quite happy doing exactly what we're doing, making the figures.

HH: So, all that back room stuff was just happening somewhere over there, so to speak?

MP: Yes, the other guys did all the hard work, and we just did the pleasurable bits. Which is fine by us!

HH: And you're happy to have stayed out of all that kind of decision-making?

MP: Obviously, now, with Perry Miniatures as a company of our own, we're a bit more involved with that side of things.

HH: So, how did that come about, that you decided it was time that you had your own name on stuff?

AP: Bryan came over and transferred Foundry to Guernsey, then when he came back again to Britain, he took over again. It was going very well for a time, but then started going in a different direction, getting into fantasy stuff.

MP: We kept saying that it was against our contract, a conflict of interest.

AP: We couldn't make fantasy stuff for him, and we couldn't really be associated with a company making fantasy figures when we're making stuff at Workshop, so that came to an end, and a few people had already suggested that we start up a company for ourselves, and we thought sure, why not?

MP: We'd come up with a few ideas for names, and then we thought, why not just use our own?

AP: One of the other reasons we could do it was because my wife, Jill, had left her work as a lecturer in Birmingham, fed up with travelling an hour each way every day, and she said that if we wanted to do our own company, she would look after it. So, that's the reason why we could say yes, we'll do it. It all came along at about the right time.

HH: So that was in...?

MP: 2001, Independence Day!

AP: Yes, 4th July – we didn't realise.

MP: We'd just come out of a discussion with Bryan, got in the car and said, "Do you know what day it is today? It's 4th July, Independence Day."

HH: How ironic!

MP: Should have called the company Independence Figures!

HH: So, at that point, you severed your connection with Foundry, and of course there were all sorts of interesting developments at Games Workshop as well, because of course *Lord of the Rings* had already got going.

MP: Yes, that started in 1999.

HH: Because you were having to work in a locked room, weren't you, with stuff being put in the safe overnight?

MP: Well, for the first year, it was guarded, we had frosted windows, steel mesh up at the windows, locked door, and a security guard walking up and down outside, and a safe which had everything locked away when we weren't there.

HH: So, what was the first you knew that this project was going to happen?

MP: We knew that *Lord of the Rings* was happening a couple of years before, because John Howe, a member of The Company of St George, a Swiss-based re-enactment group, was a friend of ours, from about 1985 onwards, and he was one of the concept artists used in the movie. We knew him very well, and we knew the film was being made, and we knew that he was involved with it, so we pinned him down with a video camera at one point and tried to get him to talk about what was happening with

The Lord of the Rings behind the scenes stuff, but he wouldn't say anything on camera – he just talked gibberish! As soon as we turned the camera off, he was a bit more forthcoming, but he refused to say anything on the record.

HH: So, this was about 1997 or '98, by which time I take it you had actually read *The Lord of the Rings*?

MP: Yes, I had.

AP: I can't remember whether I had or not. But the first time that we knew that Workshop was going to do it was when one of the managers came in, closed the door behind him and said, "We've got a very secret project, and we've got to get some figures made by this weekend, get them cast and painted and sent out by next Wednesday for the pitch". But there were only two pictures on the Internet of the creatures – that was it! Just as Jervis was walking out the door, we said "We do know John Howe, who's working on it," and he turned round and said "What?!" So we said "We'll ask, and see if we can get anything from him," but in fact we couldn't.

MP: He wouldn't, couldn't do anything for us.

AP: So all we had was these two images. Michael had to go away that weekend, unfortunately, so I had to make the two figures, which we realised in the end were the wrong scale. One was a goblin, which I made huge, and the other was an orc, which I made small! Anyway, they cast them up, and they made two units out of them, and they were painted by the Wednesday and went off to New York or somewhere, where they did the pitch. And I think that everything else went very well.

MP: I don't think there was another company that could really do it. If anyone was going to do it, it was going to be Games Workshop, because everybody would need to know "where can I buy these figures? Which store?"

HH: Exactly, because by then, Games Workshop had already undergone a major expansion, and had hundreds of shops around the world, which is what made it viable as a proposition. So, this must have been really exciting!

AP: Very exciting! Because each day, as we worked in this room, we were being sent new images of what they'd been doing over at Weta Workshops, and some digital working images as well from the animation process, which was always exciting. So every day, it was great to come in to work.

HH: It must have been incredible! And also, of course, the legacy it has given you is that whatever else happens in life, your names are on the range of figures for *The Lord of the Rings* movies, which are absolutely iconic.

MP: When it started, it was me and Alan and Brian Nelson, who built a lot of the character models, and Gary Morley, and one or two others joined in, but that was it for the first couple of years, and then it became a bit more restricted to just me and Alan, with occasional other people coming in, but I think that, in the end, we have possibly done 80% or more of *The Lord of the Rings* figures.

HH: And of course, there was the factor with some of the models that they had to be made to actually look like the actors who played the characters in the movies, which is a new challenge.

MP: Yes, you had to get them spot on, but again, it was fun to do. I can remember Brian Nelson making 26 Aragorn heads, and then going back to the second one he'd made, and picking that one! But it was good fun.

AP: For some of the actors, the full body had to be ticked off as well, so we had to get the body proportions correct, for the main actors, so it was always quite nerve-racking when you were doing a figure for one of them.

HH: So it's quite ironic – here's a couple of guys who never did life drawing classes, suddenly being told that it's got to look just like this or that actor. So when did you first get the nod to go and visit the set and meet Peter Jackson?

MP: It started with Richard Taylor and Tania Rodger of Weta coming over in 2001, and there had been some contact beforehand between a couple of people from Workshop and Weta, so Richard was coming over to see Workshop, and they were enamoured with what we were doing, because they are both sculptors themselves, so they are very much into that side of things.

AP: It was really when *The Two Towers* came along, we went along, we were given tickets by Workshop for the Paris premiere, and it so happened that John Howe was having his private view for his work on *The Lord of the Rings* the day before, so we were invited along to that as well, which was great, because it was quite a small event, about 200 people, nearly all of them from the film. And all the actors turned up, Peter was there and so was Richard, and that's when Richard introduced us to Peter.

MP: Richard said, "You've got to come and speak to Peter, he's just buying a tank. He knows you've got one, so you've got to have a chat with him!" So we had a very quiet chat while John Howe was doing his speech in French – we didn't understand it anyway, and we were right at the back of the crowd, so there was us three chatting about tanks!

HH: So did you hit it off with him immediately?

MP: Yes, we just clicked. And then just that evening, afterwards, we went for a meal with Richard and John Howe, and on the way there, Richard started talking about a project that he was trying to get done, which was Peter basically looking for 54mm figures of ANZACs. The sculptors at Weta were brilliant at doing large stuff, but they weren't coming up with the goods for 54mm, and so we said that we could probably do something about that. And so, a couple of weeks later, we sent two figures in.

HH: You blokes don't half turn them round fast, don't you!

MP: Well we probably just realised that we were onto a good thing there, so we sent them in, and we got a phone call three days later, when they arrived. It was Richard, who was in New Zealand at the time, and he said "This is exactly what we want! This is precisely what Peter is after. I'm just about to go into a meeting to show him these figures. And you must come over for the filming." Because at the premier in Paris, he'd said "We'll get you in the film," but everybody was drunk at the time, and we never really thought any more about it, thinking that he probably says that to everyone, but he said, "No, we'll get you in the film, and make sure that you get your faces on the screen." So we said "Thank you very much, we'll sort something out."

AP: It was one of those phone calls that you just couldn't believe.

MP: No, he was chatting for half an hour. He was very excited. And we'd solved something that he was having problems with Peter about, that Peter needed, and he couldn't solve.

HH: So it was really just the right people, in the right place at the right time?

MP: Yes, it was, yes, and so we went over there to New Zealand a week too early, due to email cock-ups. Me, Alan, Brian Nelson, Alessio Cavatore. Alessio was the ring-bearer for Games Workshop at the time, he was leading the project, writing the rules and so on. And Gary Morley. So they said, "You've come a bit early, because we've not actually started filming yet, but if you stay on for another week or so, we'll get you in the film when we start doing the pick-ups." And we said that we'd got to go back.

AP: So we had a week there, in the Weta studios, and towards the end they asked us again to stay on, but we just couldn't.

MP: We had girlfriends and wives waiting for us to come back, so we said that we would have to go back again. We'd fly back home, and then get flights back again. And Peter said, "You don't need to do that! What are you, men or mice? You can stay here!" And we answered, "We're mice! We'll go back, but we will be back!" He said, "There's no way you're going to get on a plane and come back here again with a 36 hour journey to Nottingham." But we said, "We will!" And so we made the arrangement to go back two weeks later, and flew back again, and he was very surprised to see us!

HH: So you went back again just two weeks later?

MP: Yes, four out of five of us. Brian, Alessio, me and Alan.

AP: But the day we arrived, we were straight onto the set.

HH: Good grief, jet lag and everything?

AP: No, we were too excited for jet lag! There were four chairs set behind Peter's, and we thought they were for the crew, but they weren't, they were for the four of us!

HH: Oh my God!

AP: The only other person to have a chair was Viggo Mortensen.

MP: So we were shown in, and almost waited on hand and foot.

HH: Unbelievable!

AP: Yes!

HH: You must have been pinching yourselves!

AP: We were! Every day, we literally pinched each other! Did that really happen? And we thought that first day was it, and next morning, we were all sitting around...

MP: ...thinking "That was great! What are we going to do for the rest of the week?" And then we got a phone call through from Peter's PA saying, "Are you coming on set today?" So we said, "Er, yeah!" And she said, "When would you like to come in? We'll send a car." So every day, we went down to watch them filming, and on the Thursday, we ended up being dead Rohan corpses. We would have been fighting in the scene outside the Black Gates as well, if we hadn't had to catch a flight.

HH: So you ended up being dead Rohirrim? So, whereabouts in the movie are you?

MP: It's in the extended DVD version. I did get an email from Peter saying he was very sorry that we didn't make it into the theatre version.

HH: But they had to cut so much to get it down to three and a half hours, or whatever it was.

MP: Well, we ended up in the extended version on Pelennor Fields, just before Pippin finds Merry.

HH: Fantastic! I'll have to re-watch that bit.

MP: But really, that was just the cherry on top of the cake, watching the whole process was amazing.

HH: So what did you find the most interesting about that process?

AP: Everything!

HH: Because you spent time at Weta Workshops as well, hadn't you, which must have been fascinating?

AP: Yes, the week before, and we couldn't believe what was happening, because Peter would see us quite often, during the first week we were there, and he took off a whole day – the first time he had taken a full day off in eight years of working on the film – to spend time sculpting with us.

HH: I've see a little video clip of this.

AP: Yes, the first time he had taken off such a long period in any one day, where he was not actually doing anything connected with the film.

MP: Richard Taylor, his best made, said he was gobsmacked. "We've never seen him do that before!" Peter's a closet sculptor himself, and I think he said in that video interview that if he wasn't directing movies, he'd like to be figure sculpting.

HH: He's a very interesting guy, because the kind of movies he'd made in the past were schlock horror, and not the person you'd expect to be able to move on to *Lord of the Rings*. I think there were a lot of people who couldn't imagine Peter Jackson doing *Lord of the Rings*. But in the end, he turned out to be the one person who could do the job – I mean, I'd read *The Lord of the Rings* umpteen times, and I think that anyone who had, had a certain vision in their head.

MP: Yes, there were so many people who needed him to get it right, and he realised that, and he knew he couldn't veer off too much from the story.

HH: Yes, it was a staggering achievement. No one is ever going to bother to make those movies again, surely?

MP: No, I can't imagine it.

HH: So did this broaden your horizons, open your eyes to new possibilities in terms of your own careers?

MP: Well, yes, we are continually making stuff for Peter, via Perry Miniatures, and he now has a company producing 1/32 scale aircraft, and we and Brian are making crew figures for it.

HH: So, who's making the aircraft models?

MP: The digital staff at Weta.

AP: So when they're not making films, they're doing this kind of stuff. It keeps them in business!

HH: Because also, they invented so much of this technology for the movies, so then you have to find something else to do with it, and move things forward.

MP: The moulding and tool making is done in China. The same people who are making the Weta Sideshow stuff and Peter's ten Lancaster bombers.

HH: Ah, yes, the Lancasters. In fact wasn't it the last time I came to see you, you'd just come back from seeing these? He's obviously a man who, once he's got a vision that he wants to do something, nothing will stand in his way!

MP: Well, the only thing that stands in his way are other projects, he's got so many on the go.

AP: But he has got the aircraft factory building First World War aircraft, and the last time we were out there is when we went up in a WWI aircraft.

HH: Oh, you actually went up in one!

MP: Yes, an FE2B, a pusher, with the pilot in front of the engine, and then the observer – me, Alan and Brian in turn – out the front. It had one gun firing forwards and another gun up over the pilot, and Peter said that he had already been up and pretended to fire the gun over the pilot's head. So we thought, well, if he's done it, we've got to do it! So each of us went up and stood up and pretended to fire this gun, about 800 feet up, with the fuselage round about knee level.

HH: Precarious!

AP: Yes, no protection at all.

HH: How's your insurance, guys?

AP: Well, you did have a harness attached to the floor, so if you fell out, you'd just sort of dangle outside.

MP: Luckily, on the day we went up, it was very calm, but the day Peter went up they did hit a pocket of air and had a rough time, and he bounced up in mid-air at one point!

HH: Wow, what an experience!

AP: Yes, it was absolutely brilliant! It wasn't that scary, actually, because I think the adrenaline was just flowing freely.

HH: I remember that when I was a little boy, I fell in love with the Shuttleworth Collection, in Bedfordshire, and I can remember as a little boy being taken to see the First World War aircraft there. And of course, at the time, I was being read the Biggles books. So I can imagine that this experience was a little dream come true for you, wasn't it?

AP: It certainly was! We just couldn't believe it. He told us that when we saw the Lancaster bomber, he would actually get us up in the aircraft.

MP: There was also the BE2 we went up in.

AP: That was mostly original, actually, the fuselage was original, and the struts were original.

MP: There was also a Bristol Fighter, which was original, but that was only brought out occasionally.

AP: And there were other aircraft taking off with ours, a Sopwith Triplane and others.

HH: So whereabouts in New Zealand is this?

AP: Near Wellington, the southern end of the North Island, at Marsterton.

HH: Great! So you were flying around in the middle of a WWI aerodrome?

AP: Yes! It was weird, because the first weekend we went up, there was supposed to be a big air show, but it was too windy for any of the aircraft to take off, but on the last day of the last weekend, it was calm enough to fly, so it was just us three, and we were outnumbered by the ground crew and pilots! So we were just standing around in the middle of all the aircraft all around us. [Mike rummages and produces the photo album of the visit.]

HH: So are these full scale reproductions? Because there are people who do them sort of two-thirds scale.

MP: No, Peter doesn't do that sort of thing! These are all full-scale.

HH: Anyway, it looks like I'd better start wrapping up the interview, and there were only two things more I wanted to ask. One of them is to ask you what you're most proud of, of all the things you've done so far, and what ambitions you've got for the future?

AP: Well, probably two things so far. One is Perry Miniatures, and the other is doing stuff for Peter.

MP: Individual figures, you're never really proud of, because there's always something you're not entirely happy with.

HH: Or is there a range of figures?

MP: *The Lord of the Rings* range, and I'm quite happy with the Sudan range. And, hopefully, I will be with the Wars of the Roses range. I think we have to be happy with the *Lord of the Rings* stuff, because we've spent such a long time on it, and I think we have done the best we can.

HH: And also, it was a very exacting brief, because it had to have a particular look. So what about your ambitions for the future? Is there anything that you feel that you've not done, and that you'd like to do for personal reasons perhaps, apart from commercial ones?

MP: Yes, personally, there are endless numbers of obscure wars that I would love to do.

HH: You've done a few already!

MP: Yes, but obviously obscure ones don't sell as well!

HH: This is why I say outside of commercial considerations, because I can't imagine that your Koreans, for example, were best-sellers.

AP: The Koreans were quite interesting, because it was nice to have something that could fight the samurai, but about halfway through the range, a really nice Korean bloke emailed me, saying that he'd got information showing that they weren't exactly like that, and basically this led to a revamp of the whole range! All the stuff that he told me had never come out of Korea before, and it wasn't even known in Japan. Not even Stephen Turnbull knew about it. In one of his Ospreys, he'd stated that the Koreans didn't even wear armour, but in fact it turns out that they were heavily armoured. The Korean chap sent me two very good books on the subject, and he translates whatever I need. So what I love about that range is that everything in it is based on new research.

HH: So where do you see Perry Miniatures going from here? And do you see yourselves staying with Games Workshop full time?

MP: Yes, we're very happy there.

AP: Sure, we're treated very well.

HH: And Perry Miniatures gives you a lot of personal fulfilment in what it allows you to do?

MP: Oh, yes, it does. If we didn't do that, I don't know what we'd do. You have to do something in the evenings, watching television! So you might as well make something that you really enjoy doing.

AP: Yes, it's relaxing.

MP: It is relaxing.

AP: You can watch television and make figures at the same time.

HH: Yes, I've seen you do it! Astonishing! I think that's one of the things that's impressive, your ability to multi-task, whereas a lot of people, if they're watching telly, that takes all their attention. Anyway,

thank you very much indeed, guys, it's been lovely and fascinating, finding out all this stuff about you. And we managed to get through the whole thing without mentioning your arm getting blown off!

MP: Oh yeah! My arm got blown off, by the way!

HH: [Laughs] When did that actually happen? It was a re-enactment thing, wasn't it?

MP: It was 1996, it was a re-enactment of the battle of Crécy, unfortunately we were fifteenth century, not fourteenth century, so it was The White Company, in France, on the battle site.

HH: So it was actually at Crécy?

MP: Yes, it was.

HH: So, at least it was authentic.

MP: It was so authentic, it was actually where the guns were in the real battle. It was the first time the English had used artillery in the field. We had five artillery pieces, which is about what they really had, and it was the second shot. The first charge went off, and I was swabbing out, and Alan brought up the second charge, I rammed it down with the rammer. The powder we were using was very heavily grained, and a piece must have got shoved up the vent hole, so it was still smouldering, and air must have got to it, even though someone had their thumb over the vent hole, and it burned through, dropped down onto the charge, and as the second charge went down with the ramrod, it went off, taking a bit of my arm with it.

HH: Do you remember much about it?

MP: I remember waking up after somebody threw a bucket of water over me, because I was burning at the time. That's when I woke up, and I think I was awake from then on, really. Initially no pain, for the first 20 minutes, and then waves of pain.

HH: Do you feel like you were in shock? Were you horrified by what had happened?

MP: Yes, I was lying on my back, when I was covered in water, thinking "Something's definitely wrong here, because I shouldn't be lying down," and then I realised that my shoulder and arm were just completely numb. I started trying to bring it over to have a look, and poking it, and so I knew that something was badly wrong there and that I had lost a few fingers.

HH: I remember you telling me that you were sitting up in bed chatting soon after. And sculpting figures!

MP: Well, yes, ten days after.

HH: That's just incredible! Because weren't you right handed?

MP: Yes, I was right-handed and then went over to being left handed. Rod Langton, even though I'd never met him before, sent me a clamp which meant that I could put a figure on it, and use it almost like an artificial arm. That was ten days after the accident, and I thought "Ah, that's interesting."

HH: So how did Rod Langton come into this? Had he heard about it?

MP: Well, he must have done, through the business I suppose.

HH: That was a lovely thing for him to do.

MP: It was, very, and I've never really said "thank you" to him in person, because as I say, I've never met him actually. So that really boosted my morale, when I realised that I could make figures with my left hand.

HH: And psychologically, how did you manage to cope with it, because I can't imagine what it must be like losing a limb?

MP: When I came back from the French hospital, where they had taken my arm off, I came back a few days afterwards and went to Queens Medical Centre here in Nottingham, and I took a figure along and asked one of the specialists how long he thought it would be before I would be able to make these again. And he just shook his head and said "No, I'm very sorry, but I don't think you'll ever be making them again." And so when that happened, I was very depressed for about a day, and that's when that clamp came in the post, and that helped a huge amount.

HH: So, we can take this as an opportunity to pass on your thanks to Rod Langton.

MP: Yes, please.

HH: So subsequently – and here I am raising money for Combat Stress, people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – have you had any episodes since then, flashbacks or anything that you have found difficult to deal with?

AP: I have! I used to wake up, about a year afterwards, quite often, at night, re-living it, because I was standing next to the gun when it went off as well. I'd loaded the charge.

HH: So did you feel any sense of responsibility at all?

AP: Oh, no! [Pointing at Michael]. It's your fault!

HH: [Laughs] So it was just the trauma of the incident, the shock.

AP: Oh yes, I was temporarily deafened as well. I was near the muzzle end too. Luckily, I had just pulled my head up as the thing went off, or my head would have been gone as well!

HH: It makes you realise that we tread a narrow thread, don't we?

MP: I don't think I've really had any ill-effects.

HH: Really, yours is a remarkable and inspiring story. There are lots of people out there who have had accidents or whatever, who find it extremely difficult to get back to who they were before.

MP: I think some people react the same way, and some people don't.

HH: It's also got to do with the people around you.

MP: Oh, yes, there was lots of encouragement.

HH: Okay, that's really it now! Thank you so much, guys.

MP & AP: You're welcome.

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