



The Final Countdown
George Finley

The Blackjack Pershing Chapter
of the
United States Artillery Association

presents the
commemorative painting

PERSHING II – THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

by George Finley



UNITED STATES FIELD ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION

PERSHING II – THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

The Pershing II rests peacefully in its cradle amid the shadows of the German forest. Soldiers shiver as the cold February dampness penetrates each layer of clothing. Without warning, the sound of the klaxon pierces the air. Infantrymen strain to detect the potential intruder. Missile crews react instinctively. Soldiers scramble to their missiles-sliding, falling, and leaving just received hot chow behind. Generators fire up, providing power to the launchers. You witness the sense of urgency, the determination, the teamwork as the countdown begins.

George Finley dramatically captures a Pershing II Firing Platoon in action performing its peacetime Quick Reaction Alert mission in the Federal Republic of Germany. He dedicates this painting to the soldiers and weapon system which preserved peace through maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent. The efforts of all Pershing soldiers played a major role in bringing about the Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union. The signing of this historic treaty on December 8, 1987 signified a commitment by President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons.

The Pershing Missile system, developed by the Martin Marietta Corporation, has defended Western Europe since 1961. First configured as the track-mounted Pershing I, the Army upgraded the system in 1969 to Pershing IA converting the missile transporter to wheeled vehicles, called erector launchers. In November 1983, the Pershing II missile system, with increased capabilities, deployed to Germany to counter Soviet deployment of increasing numbers of intermediate range nuclear missiles.

The system arrived amid intense political pressures and publicity. Soldiers exhibited an incredible sense of discipline and dedication to duty in the face of major demonstrations, with more than 100,000 demonstrators over the past several years at 56th Field Artillery Command installations to protest the stationing of Pershing II.

We can all take pride in the continuing efforts of our soldiers and this fine work of art created by George A. Finley. His work serves as a remembrance of pershing duty and of the most powerful weapon system in the history of the United States Army.

WE GAVE PEACE A CHANCE



THE ARTIST

George A. Finley is one of the best known artist of contemporary United States military subjects today. His reputation began during his cadet years at West Point when his illustrations appeared regularly in The Pointer, the cadet literary publication. Soon after graduation from the Military Academy in 1960, he began to publish his now famous series of caricatures. This work, which is often based upon his own military experiences, feature branches, specialties and activities of the United States Army. Among the most popular prints are The Commander, Where the Action is

(Staff), Service with a Heart-the Military Wife, and his aviation series. George retired from active duty in 1983 and lives in West Germany as a full time artist. In addition to continuing to portray the human side of the military, he paints the coastal subjects of northern Germany as well as scenes in and near the medieval city of Schwaebisch Hall. He has had numerous one-man shows of his fine art in Germany. George lives and works in his home which has a studio overlooking forested German hills.

Having George Finley portray the 56th Artillery Command was a natural choice. Besides George's reputation as an artist, he is personally acquainted with the Pershing weapon system. While on active duty, he commanded the 74th USA Artillery Detachment which supports the German Pershing First Missile Wing in Bavaria. To prepare himself for the task, George observed a Pershing II firing battery perform a count-down in the field: "It was 'Pershing Weather' – cold and rainy; and the rain turned to snow by the end of the day. Mud was splattered on the crew and equipment. The soldiers toiled smoothly-few words-just hustle. Moisture sparkled on their wet weather gear and the equipment. The whole activity was wrapped in a difused light from an overcast winter sky. Mist ebbed and flowed through the forest. It was important to capture this atmosphere as well as the essential elements of the platoon. The terrain is familiar to me and I have painted this landscape for years. But, the real challenge was to portray the crew under the prevailing conditions. I sensed the spirit of a good team that winter day; something one instinctively recognizes after years in the military. It was my mission to capture that spirit. It is my hope that nearly a generation of soldiers will vividly recall their particularly challenging Pershing service through my picture and recall with pride that they played a role in ushering in a new era." We think George has completed his mission superbly.

