

ARTISTS AT WAR

IN THIS MONTH'S SELECTION, WE EXAMINE THE GULF WAR PAINTINGS OF JOHN CHARLES ROACH.

BY ROD ELMSDORF

One of the Navy's most prolific Combat Artists, John Charles Roach extensively covered the action during the 1990/1991 Gulf War via his participation in Operation *Desert Shield* and Operation *Desert Storm*. As the USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67) steamed towards its action station, training continued on a 24/7 basis as the Navy prepared for extensive surface and aerial combat. *Twilight Launch* is an oil on canvas board painting executed by Roach in 1991. As the last of the sun's light fades in the west, Grumman F-14A Tomcats and other aircraft began their night exercises so that Naval Aviators can obtain experience operating in the area of the Gulf. Roach's art training began with three years of study in Paris at the National Academy of Fine Arts and this culminated in a Master's Degree from the American University.



While aboard the USS *John F. Kennedy* during the Gulf War, the artist would often make these rough watercolor on paper sketches to capture what he was viewing at the particular moment. He would then refer back to the sketches to provide material for more formalized art works. In this view, Roach has captured deck crew preparing a Sikorsky helicopter for flight. The artist served in Vietnam and the 7th Fleet as an official Navy Artist to document naval activities in-country and offshore. On active duty in the Naval Reserve, he has completed artist assignments depicting the submarine force of the 1980s, *Desert Shield/Storm*, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The invasion of Kuwait kicked off the massive military action that became known as the Gulf War. In this oil on canvas board painting, Roach has captured the USS *La Salle* (AGF-3) opening up the channel to the port city of Ash Shuaybah, thus signaling the relief of Kuwait and the return of commercial traffic to the port. However, uncontrolled fires still rage in the background and the artist has captured an ominous horizon. Built originally as an amphibious transport dock ship, *La Salle* was converted into a miscellaneous command ship. During Operation *Desert Shield*, she assumed the responsibility of commanding and coordinating the multi-national Maritime Intercept Force. Decommissioned in 2005, *La Salle* was sunk as a target ship in 2007.

