

## Flanchor (Flying at Anchor) Operations RADM Tom Fellin

VA-196 was a prominent player in the USS CONSTELLATION's (CV 64) (a.k.a. Connie) "Flying while at Anchor" period of rather unusual flight operations the summer of 1987. Connie was anchored in the Diego Garcia (a.k.a. D-Gar) lagoon and naturally weather cocked into the wind while at anchor. I'm not sure who came up with the idea, Admiral Lyle Bull (CarGru Seven), CAG Denny Ireland or Connie's operations department, but since the Battle Group was destined to be at anchor in the lagoon with a steady trade-wind blowing for a while, it was decided to attempt cats and traps. We were fortunate in that the A-6 needed only 10 knots (minimum) of wind within 10 degrees of the angle deck and the predominant wind was within those parameters. The EA-6B and S-3 had lesser wind requirements and also participated. However the F-14 and FA-18 wind requirements were in excess of 10 knots. I'm not sure why, it may have been the wind requirements, but the fighter squadrons were less than enthusiastic about Flanker Ops - so I volunteered VA-196 to take all or as many of their slots as possible. We looked at how the traps were going to be logged and when we realized that a carrier landing is a trap no matter if the CV was underway or at anchor, we were even more enthused.

I saw a huge opportunity to build up trap counts for our aircrew in what otherwise would be a significant non-flying period during the heart of our deployment. I can't recall the totals, but I think the squadron logged an average of 10 additional Flanchor traps to the cruise totals, which put VA-196 aircrews well above the other air wing squadrons in the end of cruise trap count. It should be noted that we also logged night Flanchor traps, which kept our aircrews more night current than most other squadrons.

Of course, there were some funny anecdotes like:

- Getting a "wind" wave-off for less than 10 knots of wind, or winds not down the angle
- Almost having to use the day helmet visor at night with all the lights in the lagoon.
- Depending on the direction of the wind, an immediate clearing turn was required so we wouldn't fly over the Officer's Club.
- The Hornets playing a little game with the wind. They would try to time the cat shots off the bow with planes in the groove because the thrust of the planes in the cat would actually increase the indicated wind speed for the aircraft at the ramp.
- The best, of course, was another aviator competition - time from last trap to the O'Club via liberty barge, about 30 minutes (specifics lost in time and competitive exaggerations).

One final note of which I was most proud. The final day of Flanchor ops resulted in ALL of the A-6s on the beach flying aboard before the next day's underway fly-on operations. This was a huge benefit in that all of our people and equipment (aircrews

and maintainers) were aboard when the ship sailed, so we had a nice relaxing first day underway headed north as we watched the fighter guys flying aboard.