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#### **WHALE FLIES SOUTH AFTER BEING RESCUED**

Navy transports whale that was found dying on a New Jersey beach by J01(SW) Jim Conner

The Navy's C-2 COD (carrier onboard delivery) aircraft are best known by Sailors aboard aircraft carriers for carrying people, parts and mail. However, a C-2 from Fleet Logistics Squadron 40 (VRC 40), Norfolk, last year had the opportunity to transport a female pygmy sperm whale, cargo not usually associated with any naval aircraft.

The whale was given the nickname "Inky" by staff at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. The nickname came about because of the ink-like dye this species of whale releases as a defense mechanism. Inky was rescued from the New Jersey coast on Thanksgiving Day, 1993. She was first brought to the Marine Mammal Stranding Center in Brigantine, N.J., then transferred the next day by a Coast Guard helicopter to the National Aquarium.

At the aquarium, medical staffers determined Inky was suffering from stomach disease. After a basic examination and six endoscopic procedures during a 19-day period, aquarium medical staff removed a large piece of mylar balloon, as well as pieces of clear plastic and parts of plastic garbage bags from Inky's stomach. "It's almost like she ate a small trash bag containing these items," aquarium veterinarian, Dr. Brent Whitaker said.

After five months of around-the-clock care from aquarium veterinarians, marine mammal specialists and numerous volunteers, the whale was rehabilitated and readied for release off the coast of Florida into its natural habitat. Upon final examination before leaving the aquarium, Inky weighed 323 pounds, some 116 pounds heavier than when she was found.

The Navy's assistance was requested to transport the whale from Baltimore to Florida. The air crew involved in transporting the whale on the C-2 were pilot LT Drew Basden of Virginia Beach, Va., copilot LT Tam Fennell of Boulder, Colo., in-flight plane captain Aviation Structural Mechanic 1st Class Alan Sliker of Frederick, Md., and Loadmaster ASMAA Jody Giordano of Harding, Penn.

Inky was transported in a dry sling that required attendants to keep her skin moist and cool continuously and her temperature stable by rubbing her with ointments, spraying her with water and covering her with ice packs.

Upon arriving in Florida, Inky was transported to Marineland in St. Augustine where she got used to the sunshine and warm waters before being released off the coast of Florida.

Conner is a photojournalist for All Hands.

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