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## On-station - Vol. 2 – February 2013



## CO'S CORNER



Skinny Dragon Ohana,

Hello again from Sigonella, Sicily. I hope this February edition of the VP-4 "On-Station" Newsletter finds you well.

During the month of January, I had the pleasure of visiting your loved ones at every detachment site that VP-4 operates from. Spirits are high, and the general consensus is that the busy operational tempo is making time fly. The vast differences between the missions at the different deployment sites are what make this deployment so interesting. From intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, to anti-piracy, the "Skinny Dragons" do it all. Additionally, the month of January was very fluid with regard to changes in mission requirements due to world events. This demonstration of flexibility and a wide range of skills are what make VP-4 such a valuable asset to America's safety.

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, I want to personally thank you for the sacrifices you make back at home. Without the support of our loved ones, the "Skinny Dragon" family would be incomplete, ultimately leading to a less effective warfighter. Keep up the fight on the home front, and take care until next time.

Aloha,

Skipper Strong

## SIGONELLA DIRECT



Buon giorno from Sigonella, Italy! January has been another exciting month for the "Skinny Dragons" on the beautiful island of Sicily. While still very busy, the Sailors have begun branching out to explore all that the island has to offer. On their days off, several folks have made their way to Taormina, Siracusa, and Palermo to explore the rich history of Sicily's Greek and Roman ruins. MWR trips have also become a popular off day activity, with trips ranging from wine tasting at Gambino Winery on Mt. Etna, to the World War II museum at Cimière.

On Friday January 11th, Vice Admiral Pandolfe, Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet, visited VP-4 on the Naval Air Station. He was given a demonstration of the PACT-3 trainer, a tactical simulator that the squadron uses to ensure continued operational readiness for the Anti-Submarine Warfare mission set. He was also given a tour of the squadrons most tactically advanced aircraft. While the operational tempo in Sigonella has slowed somewhat due to mission needs at the other detachment sites, the "Skinny Dragons" on NAS Sigonella continue to ensure the aircraft and crews are ready for wherever the mission takes them next. Until the February edition of Sigonella Direct, Ciao and Aloha!

## ROTA DIRECT



This January, the “Skinny Dragons” in Rota kicked off the new-year by flying an action-packed month full of sorties, boasting a 100% mission accomplishment rate. Commander, SIXTH Fleet gave the Rota team a big Bravo Zulu for producing quality mission products, due in part to an outstanding group of maintainers, aircrew, and intelligence specialists.

Maintaining a detachment sight far away from home is a dynamic task. Success takes a perfect mix of dedication and forethought to effectively respond to unforeseen changes in the operational environment. Fortunately, this is where the Rota “Skinny Dragons” excel. The maintainers work tirelessly to ensure our aircraft are always mission ready. The aircrews do their best to complete the mission, no matter what the task. A Sailor could not ask for a more rewarding mission.

In January, the Rota Sailors were joined by additional squadron members led by VP-4’s Executive Officer. The extra troops arrived in a hurry, providing support for the ever-increasingly important mission. The XO’s visit was a surprise and a boost for morale. It was nice to see some familiar faces, and was exciting to hear of the other crew members’ amazing experiences from around the Mediterranean.

## DJIBOUTI DIRECT

Detachment One here, making a difference! That has become the theme at Camp Lemonnier this New Year in the African desert. Morale this month was elevated due to the presence of our fearless leader (aka

Skipper) and his right hand man (aka CMC). They rallied the troops, reminding us that what it all comes down to is “Making a Difference.” We are the “tip of the spear” and our efforts, even the most simple of things “allows our families to sleep safe at night.” After the encouraging speech, Skipper and CMC toured the spaces, flew missions around the Horn of Africa, and stepped up to the plate -- literally taking a few swings at fast balls at base batting cages.

This New Year has brought new excitement for the VP-4 members on detachment at Camp Lemonnier. The “Skinny Dragons” have taken full advantage of MWR activities; taking trips to swim



with whale sharks and renting equipment for a friendly game of flag football. There seems to be an activity for everyone to enjoy! The “Skinny Dragons” can occasionally be found at the local hot spot, 11 Degrees North, where they sharpen their shuffleboard skills. When the “Skinny Dragons” arrive, other commands go running scared, knowing they are no match. Shuffleboard is a game of precision mixed with strategy. Skills all “Skinny Dragons” continues to master in the daily performance of their duties. Mission First – Making a Difference!



## SOUDA BAY DIRECT

Yassou! ( Γειά σου) Kalós orísate (Καλώς Ορίσατε) Hello from Joint NATO base Crete! Now that we have proper representation out here, we would love to update you on our current life affairs. At the beginning of the month, CAC-6 completed a seamless transition and flare into landing, that eventually led to the relieving of CAC-3. Thanks to the help of the seasoned crew and OIC, we were quickly introduced to the local culture.

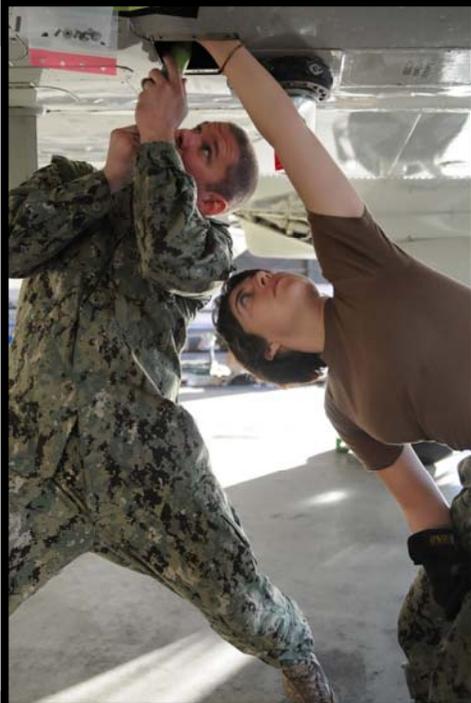
The crew enjoyed their indoctrination dinner out in town at a local restaurant on the water called Tabepua Movadinpi. Meals in Greece do not lack the family atmosphere, as the tables are full of delicious local favorites. AW1 Rasmussen agrees by claiming, “They make you feel special by welcoming you into their restaurant as if it were their own dining room”. And if one’s free time is too precious, Gyros can be ordered and delivered from the neighboring airport.

The historic scene is something to be admired. Crete holds the oldest ancient ruins dating from 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Nearby monasteries provide access to a quick and scenic hike, and for those that are interested, local wine and olive oil can be bought at the end of the hike. The locals are a helpful source for suggesting fun and relaxing things to see and do while in Crete.



Despite all the fun, there is still plenty of work to be done. CAC-6 is flying missions every other day to support the mission. Our new OIC, LCDR Drake, confirms our presence in Crete is essential by stating, “Our closer proximity to the operating area allows us longer on station time to supply CTF-65 with more information.” Of course all of these missions are not possible without the dedicated support of our unequalled maintenance department. We miss and love our families, and want you to know that we are safe and living well.

# VP-4 IN ACTION



# VP-4 HOME FRONT



# WHAT'S HAPPENING: SKINNY DRAGONS

## **Skinny Dragons New Years Eve**

By: LTJG James Rogers

Skipper Strong, XO Stapleton, and CMC Smedley received a warm welcome after visiting the night check crew to celebrate the New Year at the Patrol Squadron FOUR's (VP-4) hangar. ADC Walter Morales said, "It was great, they surprised us with cake. The night was supposed to be a regular work day. The visit brought up morale."

Being on deployment away from family members can be hard during the holidays. However, the "Skinny Dragons" are always there for each other. "They surely surprised the night check personnel on New Year's Eve with cakes and the holiday spirit. Taking care of family is a mission, and surely the 'Skinny Dragons' have accomplished this mission in every way possible." said AT3 Xin Xia. VP-4 is ushering in the New Year right -- with hard work and high morale.



## Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet Visits Patrol Squadron FOUR

By: LTJG Dustin Wilmoth



On Friday January 11th, Patrol Squadron FOUR (VP-4) welcomed Vice Admiral Frank C. Pandolfe, Commander, U.S. SIXTH Fleet, at the squadron's main deployment site on Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy. VADM Pandolfe oversees approximately 40 ships, 175 aircraft, and 21,000 personnel, which comprise the major operational component of Naval Forces Europe. VADM Pandolfe was given a tour of the PACT-3 simulator at the Commander Task Force 67 (CTF-67) Tactical Operations Center. The PACT-3 simulator is used to train combat aircrews for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) missions, and ensures each aircrew maintains a high level of ASW readiness on deployment.

“Giving the Admiral a glimpse of what we do in the aircraft was a great opportunity to highlight the capabilities of the P-3C,” said Navigator LTJG Chandler Hasemeyer of VP-4.

VADM Pandolfe also visited with CTF-67 Staff and recognized several of their Sailors during an awards ceremony. During his tour of the P-3C Orion, he was briefed on the specific capabilities of each crew station within the P-3C, primarily focusing on data transfer between the aircraft and other U.S. assets. The P-3C Orion is a maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft with a wide range of mission capabilities ranging from overland intelligence gathering to maritime drug traffic interdiction.

“With recent upgrades to the P-3C we are able to provide critical updates in near real-time, giving a Fleet Commander like VADM Pandolfe the information he needs to make time-critical decisions in a strategically important AOR.

The Admiral's visit was a unique opportunity to provide him with a demonstration of how our new capabilities enhance the way we collect and distribute this vital information.” said Pilot LT Isaiah Gammache. At the completion of his tour on Naval Air Station Sigonella, VADM Pandolfe went to the Augusta Bay port facility to tour the surface ships associated with Commander Task Force 65. The VP-4 "Skinny Dragons" have been deployed since late November, and are scheduled to return in June to their home base of Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe.

## Djibouti Whale Shark Excursion

By: LTJG Ryan Miller

Patrol Squadron FOUR (VP-4) Djibouti detachment works hard every day to keep pirates at bay. Fortunately for the “Skinny Dragons,” camp Lemonnier has an MWR that schedules sight-seeing adventures for the occasional day off. The local whale shark snorkeling and diving excursion has become a hit with the “Skinny Dragons.” The trip includes a two hour boat ride to a beautiful local reef full of fish, stingrays, turtles, the occasional eel, and an unimaginable amount of swimming crabs. The “Skinny Dragons” are driven to the whale sharks’ breeding ground and are able to snorkel in groups with the underwater beasts. AWO2 Sean Wawrzyniec describes his experience with his crew stating, “Let me paint a picture for you, during the crew whale sharking trip on the Gulf of Aiden... Tacco (LT Jennings) was exhausted and bailing out water on the boat with a broken cup... Sensor Two (AWO2 Mitchell) almost got swallowed whole by a gigantic whale shark swimming directly in her path trying to Feed!... and Sensor One (AWO2 Wawrzyniec) was surrounded by hundreds of crabs in the ocean trying to get a cheap meal!” Dan, the tour guide, explained interesting facts about the whale sharks’ behaviors and migrations. The trip was a huge success and was a great way to enjoy some rare down time. LT Andy Miller stated, “They were an impressive fish, especially their two dorsal fins which are set rearward on the body, and end in a large dual-lobbed caudal fin. These threatened docile beasts recharged our saltwater batteries, and now we’re ready to fly above the open oceans again!”



Members of VP-4 swim with the local whale sharks in Djibouti.

# Skinny Dragon Liberty

