

# Navy, Coast Guard to Surge Drug-Interdiction Support to SOUTHCOM



Chief Hospital Corpsman Bianca McQueen briefs contractors on COVID-19 mitigation tactics on the flight deck of the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Detroit while in port in Key West, Florida. Detroit is deployed to the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility to help counter drug trafficking. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Anderson W. Branch

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard will surge ships and aircraft to the U.S. Southern Command's area of responsibility to counter increased cartel drug running amid the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump and Defense Department officials announced.

At an April 1 press briefing at the White House, Trump announced that SOUTHCOM "will increase surveillance, disruption and seizures of drug shipments and provide additional support for eradication efforts, which are going on

right now at a record pace.”

“We’re deploying additional Navy destroyers, [littoral] combat ships, aircraft and helicopters; Coast Guard cutters; and Air Force surveillance aircraft, doubling our capabilities in the region,” he added. “Very importantly, our forces are fully equipped with personnel protective equipment, and we’ve taken additional safety measures to ensure our troops remain healthy.”

*[#COVID19](#) will not stop the [@DeptofDefense](#) from protecting the American people from illegal drugs. At the direction of the [@POTUS](#), additional U.S. ships, aircraft, and security forces are underway to disrupt narcotics trafficking. [pic.twitter.com/BFTbxqcFGn](https://pic.twitter.com/BFTbxqcFGn)*

– Archive: Dr. Mark T. Esper (@EsperDoD) [April 1, 2020](#)

Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the briefing that “we came upon some intelligence some time ago that the drug cartels, as a result of COVID-19, were going to try to take advantage of the situation and try to infiltrate additional drugs into our country. As we know, 70,000 Americans die on an average annual basis to drugs. That’s unacceptable. We’re at war with COVID-19, we’re at war with terrorists, and we are at war with the drug cartels as well.”

“This is the United States military,” Milley added. “You will not penetrate this country. You will not get past Jump Street. You’re not going to come in here and kill additional Americans. And we will marshal whatever assets are required to prevent your entry into this country to kill Americans.”

Attending the briefing as well was Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who added: “This initiative is part of the

administration's whole-of-government approach to combating the flow of illicit drugs into the United States and protecting the American people from their scourge."

Esper said the additional forces would "nearly double our capacity to conduct counter-narcotics operations in the region. Last year alone, United States Southern Command's operations resulted in the seizure of over 280 metric tons of drugs, much of which was designated for shipment to America."

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*Defense Secretary Mark Esper*

In a tweet that day, Esper posted a briefing slide listing in more detail the types of forces that would be surged into the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific areas off the coast of Central and South America.

The list included Navy destroyers and littoral combat ships, Coast Guard cutters, Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and Air Force E-3 Sentry and E-8 Joint STARS surveillance aircraft. The destroyers and littoral combat ships carry MH-60 Seahawk helicopters, while some Coast Guard cutters carry MH-65 Dolphin helos.

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**Modly                      Announces                      First**

# President of Naval Community College

WASHINGTON – Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly has selected Randi Cosentino as the first president of the new U.S. Naval Community College.

Cosentino comes to the Department of the Navy from Guild Education, where she served as the chief academic officer. Guild Education works with major Fortune 500 companies like Disney and Walmart to provide college-level education and training to their workforces. Cosentino received her bachelor's degree and doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania and her master's in business from Harvard Business School.

“In today's complex global security environment, we need to provide world-class education to our enlisted force of Sailors and Marines,” Modly said. “Dr. Cosentino's experience as an educator and administrator working with some of our nation's largest private-sector employers will help ensure that all of our personnel have access to a top-notch education while serving our nation.”

The U.S. Naval Community College will partner with civilian universities and community colleges to provide enlisted Sailors and Marines an opportunity to earn an associate's degree online in high demand fields like cyber, IT and engineering.

The planned delivery model, which will rely primarily on high-quality civilian universities and community colleges with proven track records delivering strong positive outcomes, is very similar to that pioneered by Cosentino at Guild, which has been praised nationally for its cost-effectiveness and high return on investment.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to serve our nation's naval services and to lead this new institution, as it develops innovative and collaborative approaches to educating America's Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen," Cosentino said. "The need for critical thinking, analytical problem-solving, and effective communication skills that a college education provides has never been more important than it is in today's rapidly changing world.

"I look forward to enhancing naval readiness by developing the intellectual foundations of our enlisted force."

As president, Cosentino will be responsible for overseeing the daily operations for the Naval Community College, which will begin teaching its first cohort of students in a pilot program scheduled for January 2021. The pilot will focus on degree programs in IT, engineering and data science. The first cohort will consist of 500 to 600 enlisted service members from the Navy, Marine Corps and the Coast Guard.

"The U. S. Coast Guard is excited to partner with the Navy and Marine Corps in establishing the United States Naval Community College," said Rear Adm. Brian K. Penoyer, the Coast Guard's force readiness commander. "Our people are the key to providing a ready, relevant and responsive Coast Guard."

"The Naval Community College will help us meet the strategic goal to sharpen the skills of the mission ready total workforce and will help position the Coast Guard to recruit and retain an inclusive and diverse workforce that reflects the American public we serve," Penoyer continued. "We see the Naval Community College as the first step in building our Mission Ready Workforce for 2040 and beyond."

Establishing the new community college is one of the primary objectives of Education for Seapower Strategy 2020, released earlier this year. The strategy called for creation of the community college because of the growing demand for technical

skills and creative problem solving in the Navy and Marine Corps.

The U.S. Naval Community College will be part of the newly formed Naval University System, which includes the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, Marine Corps University, and the U.S. Naval Academy.

Cosentino will report to John Kroger, the Navy's chief learning officer. Joining Cosentino as chief of staff is Robert Kozloski, currently acting deputy chief learning officer for the Navy. Kozloski, who served as an enlisted Sailor and Marine Corps officer, has been one of the primary architects of the Naval Community College concept.

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## **COVID-19 Testing, Isolation Expand for Crew of Aircraft Carrier as Navy Dismisses Captain**



The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill transit the Philippine Sea on Feb. 29. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Sean Lynch  
ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. Navy officials are scrambling to find accommodations on Guam to isolate thousands of Sailors from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, the first – and, so far, only – deployed Navy ship to be caught up in the coronavirus outbreak.

Meanwhile, media widely reported on April 2 that the Navy had dismissed the commanding officer of the carrier for speaking out about the Navy's response to the outbreak aboard his ship.

Nearly 1,000 of the 4,865 Sailors that the Theodore Roosevelt got underway with in January are off the ship and being isolated on Guam, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly told a Pentagon press briefing on April 1. Officials hoped to have about 2,700 off the carrier in the next couple of days, he said. Less than 100 of the Sailors have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and none have been

hospitalized, Modly said.

[See: Ship Construction Ongoing, Repairs Continuing Amid Outbreak](#)

The entire ship's company will not be evacuated all at once for security reasons, Modly stressed.

"We cannot and will not remove all the Sailors off the ship," he said, adding that except for size, the 1,092-foot-long Roosevelt is not like a cruise ship. "The ship has weapons, munitions, expensive airplanes and a nuclear reactor," he noted.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said about 1,000 Sailors would be needed to handle maintenance and security as well as for cleaning and disinfecting the huge vessel. Gilday said healthy Sailors, after 14 days of quarantine, could rotate to the Roosevelt, replacing those still working on board.

The Navy is looking beyond its own properties and other Defense Department facilities on Guam to house Sailors taken off the ship for testing, isolation or quarantine. Modly said officials are working with Guam's governor to free up hotel space there.

*We obtained 4-page letter by Capt. Brett Crozier, a Santa Rosa native, where he pleads for isolation equipment allowing his crew to self-isolate.*

*"If we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset – our Sailors."*<https://t.co/dW7giW07PL> [pic.twitter.com/SCjPWF0icK](https://pic.twitter.com/SCjPWF0icK)

*– Matthias Gafni (@mgafni) [March 31, 2020](#)*

Once Sailors are tested they will either be isolated for 14

days if they test negative for COVID-19 or quarantined if they test positive for the virus, which has sickened 927,986 around the world and killed more than 46,000 people, including more than 4,700 in the United States.

As of April 1, 1,273 Roosevelt Sailors, about 24% of the crew, have been tested for COVID-19. Only 93 tested positive. Of those, 86 showed symptoms, while the other seven did not. Another 593 tested negative. Not all test results have returned, Modly said.

Officials said they still don't know how the disease was brought on board. The Roosevelt's last port of call – 15 days before the first three Sailors tested positive for COVID-19 – was Da Nang, Vietnam, in January when the World Health Organization reported only 16 cases in the country, all far to the north in Hanoi. Modly noted that aircrews were flying on and off the carrier and before it deployed most of the crew was on holiday leave. The ship also visited Guam in February. "Understanding exactly who patient zero is, is probably going to be an impossible task," Gilday said.



Capt. Brett Crozier, now the former commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, gives remarks during

an all-hands call on the ship's flight deck in December. Crozier, in a letter sent up the Navy's chain of command, pleaded for help to stem the COVID-19 outbreak on his ship. The letter was leaked to a San Francisco newspaper. Crozier was dismissed from his post on April 2. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Alexander Williams

*"Let me emphasize that [Crozier's letter] is exactly what we want from our officers and our medical teams. We need a lot of transparency in this situation, and we need that information to flow up through the chain of command."*

*Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly*

In a March 30 letter to Navy leadership, the carrier's commander, Capt. Brett Crozier, said his ship had inadequate space to isolate or quarantine Sailors in keeping with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the Navy. "The spread of the disease is ongoing and accelerating," Crozier wrote. He called for disembarking all but a token force of about 10% of the crew from the ship until all could be tested for infection, isolated for the required 14 days and the ship adequately cleaned.

The letter was leaked to the San Francisco Chronicle, which published it two days later, on March 31. The article, which gained wide media attention, included Crozier's position that: "We are not at war. Sailors do not need to die. If we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset – our Sailors."



Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Adrian Noceda takes a sample for testing aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt on March 27. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Kaylianna Genier

Modly said the captain sent his letter through channels up the chain of command. The acting Navy secretary said that the special medical team that deployed with the Roosevelt is concerned about the same problem Crozier cited, not having enough space aboard for isolation measures, Modly said.

Citing Crozier's letter, Modly said: "Let me emphasize that this is exactly what we want from our officers and our medical teams. We need a lot of transparency in this situation, and we need that information to flow up through the chain of command." He said he didn't know how the letter leaked to the San Francisco newspaper and probably never would.

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# Navy Surface Forces, Army Attack Helicopters Conduct Ops in Arabian Gulf



AH-64 Apache helicopters operate with the expeditionary sea base USS Lewis B. Puller during a joint naval and air integration operation on March 27. U.S. Army/Spc. Cody Rich PERSIAN GULF – U.S. Navy expeditionary landing base ship USS Lewis B. Puller has been conducting joint naval and air integration operations with U.S. Army AH-64E Apache attack helicopters assigned to Army Central Command's Task Force Saber throughout March, according to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (USNAVCENT) public affairs.

The operations, which are designed to enhance the capabilities of U.S. forces to respond to surface threats, have involved Puller performing as a landing base platform for the Apaches, while Cyclone class Patrol Coastal ships select simulated

targets for them to engage. The guided-missile destroyer USS Paul Hamilton also participated in the joint operations.

“The integration of U.S. Army air weapons teams with other joint fires into the maritime environment greatly enhances our ability to expand reconnaissance and attack capability,” said Capt. Peter Mirisola, commander of Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 50/Commander, Combined Task Force (CTF) 55. “The Apaches, in coordination with our surface ships, allow us to hold an adversary at high risk at extended ranges. Combined with other joint fires, these aircraft significantly increase the precision lethality of our joint maritime forces.”

Similar integration operations with Special Operations assets were conducted in the Arabian Gulf between U.S. naval forces and MH-6M Little Bird helicopters during Operation Earnest Will from 1987 to 1988.

More recently, USNAVCENT surface forces also conducted joint naval and air integration operations with AC-130W Stinger II gunships, assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command Central, on March 8 and March 9.

“Working with USARCENT forces represents another key capability in our ongoing integration of naval and air assets across our joint and coalition force to ensure maritime superiority,” said Vice Adm. Jim Malloy, commander of USNAVCENT/U.S. 5th Fleet. “This kind of cross-domain integration allows us to maintain highly lethal and effective defensive capabilities, regardless of what platforms are operating in theater.”

DESRON 50/CTF 55 conducts maritime security operations in support of regional security and stability. Its responsibilities include planning and executing a robust regional engagement program with coalition forces from regional partners and allied navies who operate and deploy to the Arabian Gulf.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The expanse is comprised of 20 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern tip of Yemen.

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## **New NOAA Program to Support, Expand Agency's Use of Unmanned Systems**

SILVER SPRING, Md. – The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is establishing a new Unmanned Systems Operations Program to support the rapidly expanding use of these systems across the agency, according to a NOAA release.

The new program will promote the safe, efficient and economical operation of unmanned systems (UxS) that NOAA uses to collect high-quality environmental data for the agency's science, products and services.

“Unmanned airborne and maritime systems are transforming how we conduct earth science at NOAA,” said retired Navy Rear Adm. Timothy Gallaudet, NOAA's deputy administrator. “Our new unmanned systems operations program will help us dramatically increase the application and use of these technologies in every NOAA mission area.”

Unmanned systems are sensor-equipped vehicles that operate autonomously or are remotely piloted. NOAA uses them for

seafloor and habitat mapping, ocean exploration, marine mammal and fishery stock assessments, emergency response and at-sea observations that improve forecasting of extreme events, such as harmful algal blooms and hypoxia.

While the use of UxS is not new to NOAA – agency scientists have been experimenting with and using unmanned systems for decades – the recent increase in the availability of highly capable UxS has brought a corresponding increase in their innovative use as a force multiplier for many NOAA programs. NOAA’s use of small unmanned aircraft for science missions has increased more than tenfold since 2012.

The Unmanned Systems Operations Program is being established within NOAA’s Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO), which operates, manages and maintains the agency’s fleet of ships and aircraft and oversees NOAA’s diving and small boat safety programs. Its services will include training, cybersecurity, acquisition and other expert support to ensure safe, cost-effective operations across the agency.

“With the creation of this new program, we will be better positioned to transition these technologies into operational platforms that will gather critical environmental data every American relies upon,” said Rear Adm. Michael J. Silah, director of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps and OMAO.

The new program will be housed at two locations. The NOAA Aircraft Operations Center in Lakeland, Florida, will continue to support the agency’s unmanned aircraft activities. A new facility being built by the Mississippi State Port Authority in partnership with the University of Southern Mississippi in Gulfport, Mississippi, will support unmanned maritime systems.

NOAA received \$12.7 million from Congress in fiscal year 2020 to improve and expand UxS operations across the agency, including the creation of the new program – a key goal of

NOAA's recently released Unmanned Systems Strategy. The program will also help meet the objectives of the Commercial Engagement Through Ocean Technology Act of 2018, which requires NOAA to coordinate research, assess and acquire unmanned marine systems with the U.S. Navy, other federal agencies, industry and academia.

NOAA is partnering with the Navy this year to evaluate new UxS technologies for ocean science applications through the Advanced Naval Technology Exercise (ANTX) program. Now in its fifth year, ANTX enables scientists and engineers to participate in the testing and assessment of experimental technologies that can support missions of both agencies. During the exercise, dozens of new systems are tested and demonstrated to help inform government and private sector investment decisions.

NOAA is also exploring the use of artificial intelligence in combination with UxS to collect and analyze large volumes of scientific data. NOAA recently released the NOAA Artificial Intelligence Strategy in conjunction with the Unmanned Systems Strategy.

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**Geurts: Ship Construction Ongoing, Repairs Continuing Amid COVID-19 Outbreak**



Earl Cobbs of Newport News, Virginia, grinds a bulkhead in the hangar bay aboard the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis in Norfolk during the carrier's refueling and complex overhaul. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Joshua L. Leonard

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is continuing to build and repair ships amid the COVID-19 pandemic but also is looking ahead to position itself to accelerate as the nation recovers from the pandemic, the service's top acquisition official said.

The repair yards are "continuing to get the work done," James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said during an April 1 teleconference with media.

"We'll see some challenges," Geurts said, but noted that his office is focused on "one or two steps down the road" and on "how to accelerate out of recovery" to maintain the readiness of the fleet.

[See: COVID-19 Testing, Isolation Expand for Crew of Aircraft Carrier](#)

He said that 95% to 98% of the Navy's acquisition work force is teleworking and that he "was not seeing a drop-off in performance."

The assistant secretary reiterated his focus on three lines of operation:

- The health of the defense industrial work force, including the government work force and its industrial partners such as prime contractors, subcontractors, small suppliers and individuals.
- Ensuring the health of the industrial base.
- Ensuring warfighting readiness of the Navy and U.S. Marine Corps.

"We haven't slowed down," he said, and that the work force "is continuing to press hard."

Geurts said he continues to see some tightening in the supply chain and that his workforce is continually reassessing measures to work out the challenges. He lately is focusing attention on the transportation and distribution networks to monitor potential disruptions in the supply chain.

Geurts has been pressing to get contracts issued earlier than normal to assure the shipbuilders and repair yards and their suppliers that "work is coming."

He pointed out that awarding contracts two months early has the advantage of getting planning and work started early; "creating some resiliency" as challenges arise; and making possible an acceleration of the post-pandemic recovery.

He said that contracts awarded recently included those for two Navajo-class towing, salvage and rescue ships; 18 P-8A maritime patrol aircraft, the AIM-9X Sidewinder air-to-air

missile, berthing barges and patrol boats, and that contracts were imminent for a Block II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship and for the new class of utility landing craft.

He also said he has yet to see the impact of the pandemic on the next-generation frigate program.

Geurts also pointed to the upcoming April commissionings of the Virginia-class attack submarines Delaware and Vermont and the upcoming combat systems completion of the guided-missile cruiser USS Zumwalt as evidence that the Navy's acquisition of ships is not slowing down.

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## **Cutter Stratton Departs for Eastern Pacific Counter-Narcotic Patrol**



The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Stratton lines the rails of the flight deck as the cutter moors last November following a 162-day patrol in the western Pacific Ocean. The crew left again March 28 on a months-long deployment to the eastern Pacific. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 1st Class Matthew S. Masaschi

ALAMEDA, Calif. – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Stratton got underway from Coast Guard Island on March 28 for a months-long deployment to the eastern Pacific Ocean, where the crew will patrol international waters off Central and South America to intercept and deter drug-trafficking efforts.

The cutter is currently conducting training and an at-sea

health evaluation to ensure the crew is COVID-19-free and fully ready for operations.

“Times of crisis are when the nation counts on the U.S. Coast Guard and other military services to perform,” said Capt. Bob Little, Stratton’s commanding officer. “Cutter Stratton is capable of a wide range of homeland and national-security missions that are vital during a national emergency. Our crew understands the importance of sustaining these missions now, more than ever. It’s never easy to leave your families behind, and this deployment is no exception. Our families will be carrying a particularly large burden while we are away, but their resilience is at the center of our ability to provide maritime security for the nation.”

In fiscal year 2019, the Coast Guard conducted 236 separate drug events, detained 611 suspected smugglers and removed more than 458,000 pounds of cocaine worth more than \$6.1 billion.

One in five global drug-related deaths occur in the United States, and drugs have since 2000 cost the U.S. \$193 billion in crime, health, safety and lost productivity annually. The drug trade also funds cartels’ illegal activities in their home countries, spreading corruption and instability throughout the region.

The Stratton will be deployed in support of Campaign Martillo, The U.S.’s whole-of-government effort to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, which includes efforts of 16 U.S. agency partners, including the Coast Guard, the U.S. Navy, Customs and Border Protection, FBI, DEA, HSI, and U.S Attorneys in California, Florida and Puerto Rico, New York, Texas, Alabama and Ohio.

Campaign Martillo also includes the participation of 21 nations who work together to counter cartels and illicit trafficking traveling via air or waters of the Western Hemisphere.

The campaign is led by Joint Interagency Task Force South, a component of U.S. Southern Command, which oversees the detection and monitoring of illicit traffickers traveling via air and seas and supports U.S. and multi-national law enforcement agencies with interdictions.

The actual U.S.-led at-sea law enforcement boardings are conducted by trained Coast Guard members under the tactical control of the Coast Guard's 11th District, which is headquartered in Alameda.

"It is critically important the Coast Guard continues our lifesaving work during this national emergency," said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, commander, Pacific Area.

"Our missions ensure the safety of Americans and the security of our maritime borders, and they enable the safe flow of commerce into U.S. ports. In this challenging COVID-19 environment, we have armed our members, like the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Stratton, with the necessary training and equipment to prevent exposure to the virus, and we made sure their families back home are supported."

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## **Raytheon, MDA Sign \$2 Billion Standard Missile-3 Contract**

TUCSON, Ariz. – Raytheon Co. will produce and deliver SM-3 Block IB interceptors under a \$2.1 billion, multiyear U.S. Missile Defense Agency contract, the company said in a release. The deal is the first multiyear contract for the SM-3 program and covers fiscal years 2019–2023.

SM-3 is the only ballistic missile interceptor that can be

launched on land and at sea. It is deployed worldwide and has achieved more than 30 exo-atmospheric intercepts against ballistic missile targets.

“This procurement deal is a win-win for government and industry,” said Mitch Steverson, Raytheon Strategic and Naval Systems’ vice president. “Efficiencies gained from this contract will allow us to reduce costs, continue to improve the SM-3 and deliver an important capability to our military.”

The Block IB variant achieved full-rate production in 2017. The company has delivered more than 400 SM-3 rounds over the lifetime of the program.

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## **Navy Regional Maintenance Centers Continuing Work Amid COVID-19 Crisis**



A docking team from the Japan Regional Maintenance Center (RMC) collaborates with port operations workers to close a caisson. The RMCs are continuing to maintain Navy ships amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the sea service says. U.S. Navy/Ryo Isobe

WASHINGTON – In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Navy’s Regional Maintenance Centers (RMCs) are continuing to maintain the Navy’s ships, even in countries where the pandemic is especially severe, the Navy said.

“Our priority is the protection of our workforce, [and] our commanders have the flexibility to respond to conditions in

their areas to effectively carry out their missions while meeting the critical needs of their people,” said Colleen O’Rourke, spokeswoman for Naval Sea Systems Command, in response to a query from *Seapower*. “Our RMCs continue to maintain the readiness of our fleet.”

The Navy has RMC activities in two countries hardest hit by the virus, at Rota, Spain, and Naples, Italy.

“We are committed to taking every measure possible to protect the health of our force,” O’Rourke said. “We remain in close coordination with host nation authorities, U.S. Embassy and public-health authorities to ensure the well-being of our personnel and local population.”

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## **Marine Recruiting Command Transitions to Digital, Telephonic Prospecting**

QUANTICO, Va. – Amid the national emergency caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) is taking steps to protect recruiters and applicants, their families and their communities by limiting face-to-face interactions with the public, the command said in a release.

Effective immediately, MCRC will temporarily transition to prospecting entirely via digital and telephonic means, and Marine recruiters will no longer meet with new applicants in person.

“The preservation of our recruiting force, applicants, poolers and their families is the highest priority

for the Marine Corps Recruiting Command during this national emergency,” said Maj. Gen. James W. Bierman, commanding general of MCRC. “With that in mind, we will immediately transition to prospecting exclusively via digital and telephonic means, and no longer initiate in-person interviews. We remain committed to recruiting the highly-qualified men and women our nation needs for its Marine Corps.”

“Because recruiting is an activity of vital importance to our nation and Corps, we will continue our efforts to ship young men and women to our recruit depots and officer candidate school as conditions permit,” Bierman said. “At the same time, it is recognized this imperative is not the only consideration. Our efforts will prioritize protecting our Marines and families.”

Local recruiting offices will continue to be staffed, but at reduced manpower levels commensurate with social distancing guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Leaders at every level have full discretion to carefully appraise the personal and geographic risk factors unique to each situation and then move to curtail or modify activities when necessary. Travel is limited to mission-essential requirements, and no more than two individuals will travel in a vehicle.

Any member of the recruiting staff who has family members in a high-risk category as it pertains to COVID-19 will work remotely from their home.