

# Navy Cybersecurity Director: 'No Relaxation of Defenses' During Telework Time



Sailors stand watch in the Fleet Operations Center at the headquarters of U.S. Fleet Cyber Command. U.S. Navy ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is maintaining a vigilant cyber watch over its data networks as it balances network security and protecting the health of its Sailors amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a Navy admiral said.

“We’re trying to balance two different priorities,” Rear Adm. Kathleen Creighton, director of cybersecurity in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, said during an April 17 webcast that was part of the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition. “One is keeping our Sailors and civilians safe and to enable them to work remotely and second is to ensure operational readiness.”

**To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click [here](#).**

Creighton said the Navy has had to go through a big cultural shift from working in offices to “ensuring as many people as possible can work from home remotely.”

She said that, in addition to Defense Department partners, the Navy’s industry partners had taken a “first responder-type approach to helping the Navy” by adding infrastructure to handle the ballooning demand for secure telework.

*“We’re trying to balance two different priorities. One is keeping our Sailors and civilians safe and to enable them to work remotely and second is to ensure operational readiness.”*

*Rear Adm. Katherine Creighton*

The admiral cited the need for significant expansion of capacity, the need to maximize collaboration capabilities, and determination of any need to change cybersecurity policy “to ensure we can take advantage of remote telework options.”

She said that “on any given day probably only a few thousand people accessed the Navy’s network remotely ... before COVID-19. Now, we are seeing upwards of 150,000 or more people accessing the network remotely.”

The great increase in telework required an expansion in capacity requirement for laptop computers, mobile phones, iPads and the VPN servers that they connect to as well as an expansion of Microsoft Outlook 365 use. Circuitry also had to be added to handle the increased use of devices as well as more people manning the help desk for the network.

Creighton said the Navy “has been on a road to modernize and to start using more collaboration capabilities, and this crisis has pushed us to roll those out faster. We’re using some temporary capabilities, and we’re looking to accelerate

our permanent capabilities.”

She said the Navy is discovering where the bottlenecks in the network are and fixing them on a piece-by-piece basis. In addition to expanded circuitry, the Navy has been cleaning up user accounts and increasing licenses.

“Every time we increased the capacity, it was used. It filled right up,” she said. “So, the Navy is taking working from home very seriously, trying to protect our Sailors and civilians.”

“Our adversaries in cyberspace know we were doing business differently, so they are responding in kind,” she said, “so we have made sure that anything we have done has not relaxed our cybersecurity standards.”

“There has been no relaxation of any defenses,” she said. “We are securely connecting with that same network from home.”

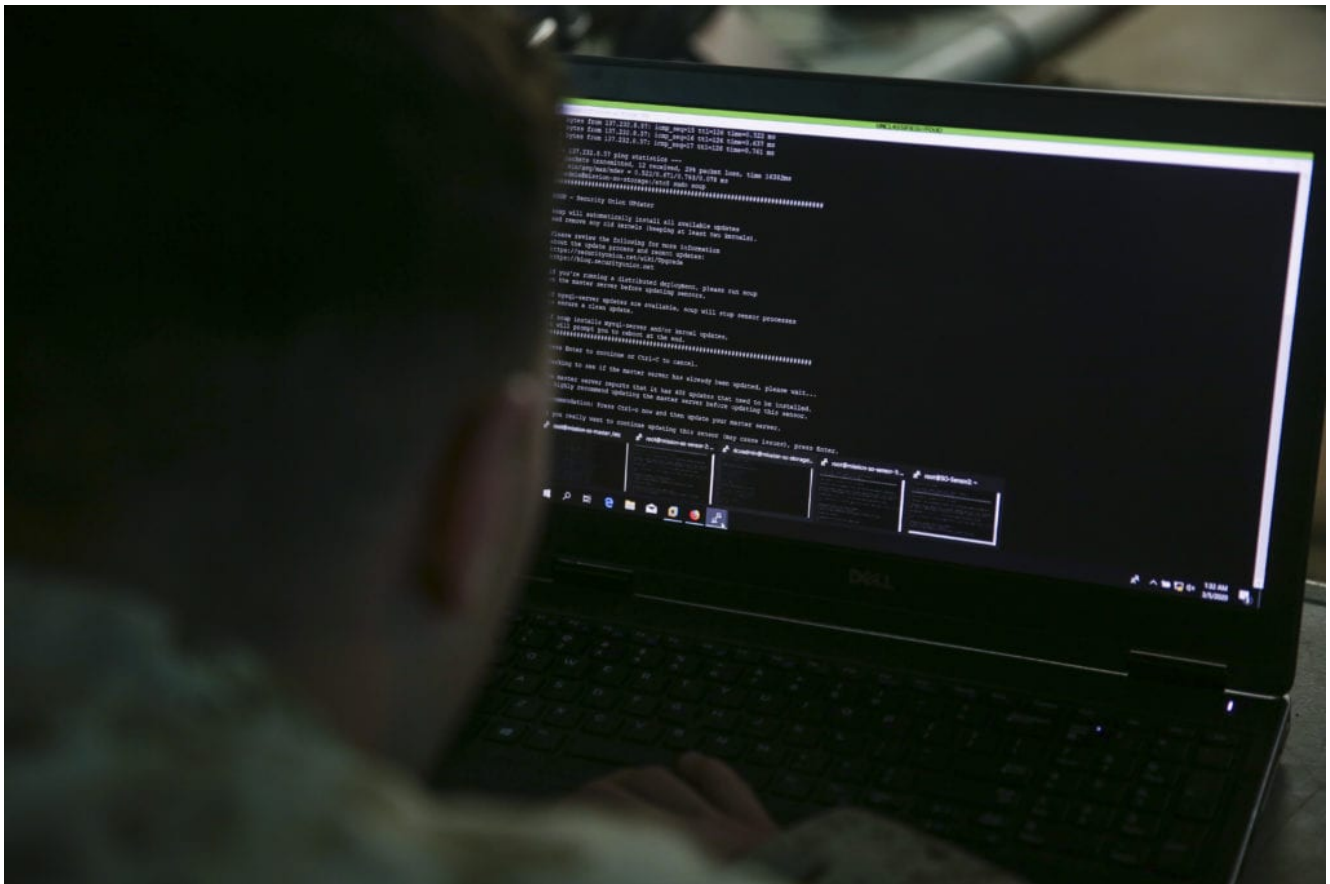
Creighton said a temporary cloud is being set up to handle a faster roll-out of Office 365.

Looking to the future after the COVID-19 pandemic, Creighton said she believes “there would be a desire to continue a greater level of telework than we saw in the past, so we need to be sure that our network has the capacity to do that, that we have the procedures in place to do it, but most importantly we’re able to do it securely to protect our information and our people’s identity and other things we value as a Navy.”

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## **Marine Cyber Official: ‘Our**

# Networks Are Resilient' in COVID-19 Environment



A U.S. Marine assess data during an exercise, Native Fury 20, in the United Arab Emirates on March 5. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Alexis Flores

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps' cyber networks are being defended and upgraded even as the COVID-19 pandemic forces ad hoc adaptation in their operation, a senior Marine Corps official said.

“Our networks are good, and they are operating at a good capacity and are resilient,” said Gregg Kendrick, executive director of Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command, speaking April 17 in a webcast for Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition.

To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click [here](#).

“We’re pleased with our effective efforts in our ability to support the force as it has gone to ad hoc telework or alternate work sites and maintain our capacity and, more importantly, our operational capability to support our warfighters and our commanders that are out there deployed in harm’s way.”

Kendrick said the Corps is monitoring its networks differently in the current environment.

“We do look at our virtual private networks and then we look at our physical and transport layer, our network stack from Layer 1 to Layer 4, so from that perspective we’re focused on those types of metrics and really watching our latency,” he said.

“So, we are very focused on the security. Every decision we have made in regards to supporting the ad hoc telework option has really [been] focused. We’ve had a fundamental security look, and we’ve really looked at our modernization efforts to ensure that we are aware of any of the advanced persistent threats and/or capabilities that are out there to ensure that we have a good, resilient as well as available network.”

*“We’re pleased with our effective efforts in our ability to support the force as it has gone to ad hoc telework or alternate work sites and maintain our capacity.”*

*Gregg Kendrick, Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command*

Kendrick said his force is looking at “which applications are in use the most, which are stressed the most at the highest capacity, what exactly are our latent measures, ... and our overall bandwidth [including] by bandwidth region. Everything [security metrics] is funneled through our enterprise security desk so that we can rapidly pull metrics and shift resources as needed to support our Marine warfighters.”

He said Cyberspace Command is starting to see trends in the pandemic environment, "but we are definitely waiting for this to evolve and then we will be able to draw conclusions, but at the same time we don't want to let a trend propagate to a point where we have to go into a different work cycle."

"The bad guys are always looking at what we're doing, and they are looking to do harm," Kendrick said. "We protect our workforce. We secure, operate and defend the Marine Corps enterprise networks."

Kendrick said that through the Corp's new command-and-control network structure the service is bringing a "unity of command that provides a much clearer readiness picture of our network, our resiliency picture, and then a better overall visualization of the data flow from the end points all the way to the data centers and then back out where they need to go."

The executive director said the Corps is adopting Microsoft Office 365 to achieve a more efficient capability combined with a hybrid cloud architecture, aiming for higher velocity.

"In the end state the adversary gets a vote," he said. "They move at speed unconstrained by rules of engagement or the laws of nation states. We need to implement the best infrastructure, the best applications, the best operational processes as efficiently as possible so that we can modernize, provide the best capability to the warfighter, at the same time ensuring security from adversary actions and resiliency across the networks."

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# In Perhaps a First, USS Delaware Commissioned Underwater



The USS Delaware transits the Atlantic Ocean with some company after departing Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding division during sea trials last August. U.S. Navy via Ashley Cowan/Huntington Ingalls Industries

ARLINGTON, Va. – The COVID-19 pandemic is driving the U.S. Navy to adapt some of the ways it conducts business, but the commissioning of a submarine underwater is likely to be a first.

The Virginia-class attack USS Delaware was commissioned into the Navy on April 4 while the sub was underwater, James F. Geurts, assistant secretary for research, development and acquisition, told reporters during an April 16 teleconference.

Geurts said the Delaware's crew replicated commissioning ceremony traditions that could be accomplished beneath the surface, including "bringing the ship to life" and sounding the claxon. The crew also fired water slugs through the Delaware's torpedo tubes.

"Due to public health safety and restrictions on large public events, the commissioning ceremonies for the future USS Delaware and future USS Vermont were canceled for April 4 and 18, respectively," Bill Couch, a spokesman for Naval Sea Systems Command, told *Seapower* back on March 24.

A Navy release added: "Although the traditional commissioning ceremony was canceled due to restrictions on large gatherings brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Navy commissioned USS Delaware administratively on April 4 and transitioned the ship to normal operations. Meanwhile, the Navy is looking at an opportunity to commemorate the special event with the ship's sponsor, crew and commissioning committee."

The Delaware is the eighth and last Block III Virginia-class SSN. The Vermont is the first of 10 Block IV Virginia-class subs. The two subs were built jointly by General Dynamics' Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls' Newport News Shipbuilding.

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## **SUPSHIP Turns to Fusion for Facemasks**



NNSY's Sail Loft has begun making facemasks to further ensure the health and safety of workforce personnel, with a capacity to produce up to 900 daily. COVID-19-specific Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been distributed to the USS George H.W. Bush, USS Wyoming and USS San Francisco projects. NNSY/Danny De Angelis

WASHINGTON – When Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Conversion and Repair Newport News' supply of protective facemasks to combat COVID-19 dwindled to 30 by the morning of April 9, SUPSHIPNN's commanding officer, Capt. Jason Lloyd, turned to his staff for a solution, according to Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA).

An order for more masks had already been placed but they would not arrive until the following week. He needed a solution that would enable the command to continue its fleet support mission.

His staff turned to Fusion, an internal Navy collaboration tool that is like Facebook and was developed by Naval Information Warfare Systems Command connecting NAVSEA

employees virtually throughout the world.

"As the SUPSHIPNN Command Process Improvement Champion, I have been a fan of the NAVSEA Fusion site since its inception," said Greg Mitchell, SUPSHIP Newport News' command process improvement champion. "I immediately posted a plea for help on Fusion early" on the morning of April 9.

"Fusioneers" – as Mitchell termed his fellow collaborators – responded with numerous recommendations and offers to assist. One of those responses led to Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY), co-located in Norfolk, a command already using its internal capability to sew cloth facemasks for its workforce.

"I reached out to them," Mitchell said. "By 1400 that same day, I had 100 brand-new masks made by Norfolk Naval Shipyard's production resources group in their sail loft I could deliver to my command."

In an e-mail to the shipyard's commanding Officer, Capt. Kai Torkelson, Lloyd thanked his NAVSEA colleague, calling the success of Fusion as a "perfect example of teamwork and knowledge sharing. ... Fusion collaboration at its finest."

Mitchell said that in order to answer NAVSEA Commander, Vice Adm. [Thomas] Moore's call to "Expand the Advantage" the command needs to become a High Velocity Learning (HVL) organization. "There is no better way to use HVL than Fusion," he said. "Thanks to everyone involved who made this a complete Fusion success. We are and will always be a "One Navy" Team!"

Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Conversion and Repair, Newport News, is the liaison between the Department of the Navy and Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding, the company engaged in the design and construction of new nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers as well as the repair and modernization of active subs and carriers in the fleet.

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# 2nd Fleet Keeps Truman Strike Group at Sea as Ready Carrier Amid Pandemic



Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 2nd Class Albert Gibson chains an E-2D Hawkeye to the flight deck of the USS Harry S. Truman in the Atlantic Ocean on April 11. The Truman Carrier Strike Group is conducting operations there. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Bela Chambers  
NORFOLK, Va. – The Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group remains at sea in the western Atlantic as a certified carrier strike group force ready for tasking to protect the crew from the risks posed by COVID-19, following their deployment to the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operation, the U.S. 2nd Fleet said in a release.

The Navy is taking this measure to maintain the strike group's warfighting capability while ensuring the safety of the crew.

[See: U.S. Military in All-New Territory in Fight Against Virus, Foggo Says](#)

The demand for naval assets remains high. Therefore, keeping the Truman strike group at sea as it remains in the sustainment phase of optimized fleet response plan (OFRP) allows the ship to maintain a high level of readiness for a potential rapid surge or forward deployment, providing options to the national command authority during the global pandemic.



The Truman and its strike group remains at sea in the western Atlantic to protect the crew from the risks posed by COVID-19. U.S. Navy/Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 1st Class Brandon C. Cole

“The ship is entering a period in which it needs to be ready to respond and deploy at any time,” said Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, commander of the 2nd Fleet. “Normally, we can do

that pierside, but in the face of COVID-19, we need to protect our most valuable asset, our people, by keeping the ship out to sea.”

The Navy will continue to evaluate the situation and will provide an update to the crew and their families in about three weeks.

“After completing a successful deployment, we would love nothing more than to be reunited with our friends and families,” said Rear Adm. Andrew Loisel, commander of Carrier Strike Group 8.

“We recognize that these are unique circumstances and the responsible thing to do is to ensure we are able to answer our nation’s call while ensuring the health and safety of our Sailors. We thank you for your continued love and support as we remain focused on this important mission.”

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## **Foggo: U.S. Military in All-New Territory in Fight Against Virus**



Hospitalman Recruit Jacob Cortes monitors the level of oxygen in a tank aboard the hospital ship USNS Mercy on April 14, docked in Los Angeles in support of COVID-19 response efforts. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Luke Cunningham ARLINGTON, Va. – The scope of the COVID-19 pandemic shows the new domain that the U.S. military must prepare to operate in, according to the top commander of U.S. naval forces in Europe and Africa.

“That seventh domain is just simply germs. It’s the biosphere we operate in,” Adm. James Foggo III said April 15 during a webcast for Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition. “And I think we’re going to have to take that into account in our preparations for deterrence and defense in the future.”

**To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click [here](#).**

Foggo, commander of Allied Joint Force Command, which is based in Naples, Italy, as well as U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Africa, said the challenges of a massive NATO

exercise, Trident Juncture 2018, which involved 50,000 personnel, 70 ships, 10,000 ground vehicles and 165 different aircraft, taught him that logistics should be added to the five battlespace domains of land, sea, air, space and cyber. However, the coronavirus outbreak that has sickened 1.9 million people worldwide, killed more than 123,000 and devastated Italy shows that there's now a seventh domain.

*"That seventh domain is just simply germs. It's the biosphere we operate in."*

*Adm. James Foggo III*

"It hit us earlier, here in Italy," where the Joint Force has facilities at Aviano Air Base in the north, Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily and Gaeta, near Naples, where the amphibious command ship USS Mount Whitney, the flagship of the 6th Fleet, is based.

Foggo credited Microsoft founder, billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates for suggesting in a 2015 speech that, in addition to traditional wargames and tabletop exercises, pandemic planning take priority.

Foggo also cited a fast-spreading virus wargame, Urban Outbreak 2019, co-sponsored by the U.S. Naval War College, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Lab, as "a start in preparation for the future and incorporation into our planning processes."



Adm. James Foggo III, commander of Allied Joint Force Command, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Africa, spoke on April 15 during a Navy League Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webcast.

The admiral stressed the importance of testing for COVID-19 to determine if someone is infected and whether persons they've come in contact with be isolated.

"Testing works in our favor," Foggo said. "We can't afford to take anybody off the line in a day of Great Power Competition, where we have adversaries, competitors and, most importantly, we have violent extremists who take advantage of any chink in the armor."

In the future, "we're going to have to plan ahead on how we're going to protect the force against something like the coronavirus until we get a vaccine against COVID-19, and then beyond that there will be a next coronavirus, and I think we'll be much better prepared for that in the future."

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# Geurts: Accelerated Acquisitions Position Navy, Industry for Period After COVID-19 Crisis Wanes



An artist rendering of the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. The Navy's top acquisition official said April 15 during a Navy League Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webcast that work is proceeding on such programs as the Columbia SSBN and the next-generation guided-missile frigate, despite the disruption of COVID-19. U.S. Navy

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's top acquisition official said the service's efforts to accelerate contract awards in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic are helping the defense industry sustain its economic health at all levels and positioning the Navy and industry to emerge from the

crisis without falling behind on work and ready to resume normal operations.

James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, speaking during an April 15 webcast of the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space: Virtual Edition, said the Navy and the defense industry are working to keep on task and be in a position to accelerate "out of the crisis."

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"Ships still have to come out on time," Geurts said, noting that the Navy can't afford to lag once the world starts to recover from the crisis.

Geurts said the Navy has moved up the award of some contracts to inject "a lot of money in the system" to "get funds in the contractor hands" and "bring that work to the left" – meaning getting in started sooner. An example is the award last week – months early – of LPD 31, the second Flight II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship.



James F. Geurts (right), assistant secretary of the Navy

for research, development and acquisition, and Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition moderator Francis Rose discuss Navy and defense industry acquisitions preparedness during and after the pandemic.

Accelerating contract awards enables shipyards and other contractors to stack a backlog of work and keep their workers employed. The contractors also can push funds to their lower-tier subcontractors to the same effect.

Geurts said it was “counterintuitive ... that the best way to secure [the health of the defense industrial base] was to accelerate going into a crisis. Most folks would want to slow down, wait and see, and that would exactly create the wrong conditions.”

“The risk is being too risk-averse in our approach. The other risk is being reckless in our approach.”

*“Ships still have to come out on time,” even as the Navy and industry weather but eventually recover from the pandemic.*

*James F. Geurts*

He said that all of stakeholders are going at the situation “deliberately but urgently and thoughtfully. A challenge for us will be [that] it’s not a one-size-fits-all solution. This crisis hits different areas of the country, different sectors differently at different times. The key to success will be great networks, leveraging the data we have and building on a foundation of trust.”

As the Navy worked to advance contract awards, Geurts said he saw his now “massively distributed,” largely teleworking work force shows greatly improved performance as it works to help the defense industry get through the pandemic.

The Navy also is ordering spare parts sooner to build up the supply and to shore up the suppliers who provide them.

Geurts said he confers with shipyard presidents or CEOs every other day to assess the status of work and provide opportunities to share lessons learned and to discuss best practices, ways to avoid disruption and how to speed up recovery.

“It’s been awesome,” he said of the response from the defense industry.

The assistant secretary said the Navy’s acquisition priorities have not changed in the pandemic, citing that work is proceeding on such programs as the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine and the next-generation guided-missile frigate. He stressed the Navy’s ongoing efforts to minimize delays and disruptions to the service’s programs.

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## **COVID-19 Piles on Coast Guard’s Funding, Readiness Challenges, Says Commandant**



Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Evan Grills is fitted for an N95 respirator at Air Station Kodiak, Alaska, on March 24. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, aircrews are taking additional measures to reduce potential exposure to the virus while also maintaining full mission readiness. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 1st Class Bradley Pigage

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Coast Guard, already facing longer term readiness and funding issues, is shifting manpower and equipment to meet the new challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the commandant of the Coast Guard told Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition on April 13.

With the novel coronavirus also forcing the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Army and Air Force to come up with new ways to shield the force while still protecting the nation, Adm. Karl Schultz said his primary focus is on “maintaining a ready, healthy workforce to accomplish the Coast Guard’s primary missions” to facilitate the marine transportation system.

**To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click [here](#).**

## [See: As Part of Investments, Coast Guard Creates Major S.C. Base](#)

“Right now, we’re focused on people, readiness and enabling the economic prosperity and security of the nation,” Schultz said, noting the Coast Guard’s role as part of the Department of Homeland Security and its mission.

In addition to safeguarding the nation’s 355 seaports and 25,000 miles of commercial waterways as well as conducting maritime search and rescue and counter-narcotics operations, the constantly moving COVID-19 challenge has added new obstacles like offloading tens of thousands of cruise ship passengers, some of them ill with the virus. Coast Guardsmen [did so](#) April 2, helping to escort the cruise ships Zaandam and Rotterdam to port in Port Everglades, Florida.



Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz participates in the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space: Virtual Edition.

Schultz also noted that there are between 75 and 100 commercial vessels in U.S. waters with as many as 100,000 crewmen on board who may need Coast Guard assistance at some point during the crisis.

Before the coronavirus outbreak, the Coast Guard was facing a readiness challenge with aging ships and aircraft, deteriorating infrastructure ashore and an information-technology system on “the brink of catastrophic failure,” the commandant said in his State of the Coast Guard address in February.

*“But the focus right now is [a] ready Coast Guard, men and women, to get into the fight and get after these COVID-19 challenges that are in our wheelhouse.”*

*Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz*

Schultz said thousands of Coast Guard personnel are now teleworkers because of social-distancing rules, but thousands more are still front-line operators in the air and on the water. “This is really showing just how critical this C5I [command, control, communications, computers, cyber and intelligence] issue is,” Schultz said. “Clearly there’s a money piece to this,” he added. “We’ve got to stop patching old systems.”

When he took command of the Coast Guard in June 2018, Schultz said his focus was on people – getting better facilities and equipment for them, an improved retirement system and recruiting for a more diverse force representative of the nation.

“People remains the absolute center of gravity for Coast Guard readiness,” he said in a live-streamed question-and-answer session during Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition.

“But the focus right now is [a] ready Coast Guard, men and women, to get into the fight and get after these COVID-19 challenges that are in our wheelhouse,” he added.

The Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition event was created after the annual live exposition had to be canceled due to a

prohibition against large gatherings in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# Theodore Roosevelt Sailor Dies of COVID-19 Complications



Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 1 and 5 coordinate transportation of Sailors assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt who have tested negative for COVID-19 and are asymptomatic from Naval Base Guam to Guam government and military-approved commercial lodging. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Nathan Carpenter

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii – A Sailor assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt who was admitted to the intensive care unit at the U.S. Naval Hospital Guam on April 9 died of COVID-related complications on April 13, the U.S. Navy

confirmed.

The name of the Sailor is being withheld for 24 hours after the crew member's family is notified.

The Sailor, who tested positive for COVID-19 on March 30, was removed from the ship and placed in an isolation house on Naval Base Guam with four others from the Theodore Roosevelt. Like other Sailors in isolation, he received medical checks twice daily from Navy medical teams.

At about 8:30 a.m. on April 9, the Sailor was found unresponsive during one of those medical checks. While Naval Base Guam emergency responders were notified, CPR was administered by fellow Sailors and onsite medical team in the house. The Sailor was transferred to U.S. Naval Hospital Guam, where the Sailor was moved to the ICU.

USS Theodore Roosevelt arrived in Guam on March 27 for a scheduled port visit for resupply and crew rest but remains there while its crew members are treated or housed. As of April 12, the Navy reported 945 servicewide cases of COVID-19 – a majority of those, 735, are Sailors, including 550 from the Theodore Roosevelt itself.

The captain of the carrier, Brett Crozier, who later tested positive and went into quarantine himself, drew attention to his Sailors' plight with a March 30 letter to Navy leadership.

The four-page letter was leaked and ran the next day with a story in the San Francisco Chronicle, drawing worldwide media attention to the ship and setting off a series of events that saw the captain relieved of his command and the acting Navy secretary resigned after criticizing Crozier in a profanity-laced speech in front of his crew.

In an April 13 statement, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said, "We mourn the loss of the Sailor from USS Theodore Roosevelt who died today, and we stand alongside

their family, loved ones and shipmates as they grieve.”

He continued: “This is a great loss for the ship and for our Navy. My deepest sympathy goes out to the family, and we pledge our full support to the ship and crew as they continue their fight against the coronavirus. While our ships, submarines and aircraft are made of steel, Sailors are the real strength of our Navy.”

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## **Modly Resigns After Backlash Over Insults Directed at Carrier’s Ousted Captain**



Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly, who had his temperature checked March 31 during a COVID-19 screening before boarding the hospital ship Mercy in Los Angeles, resigned April 7 after a backlash over his comments toward the former captain of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. He later apologized for those remarks. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Natalie M. Byers

ARLINGTON, Va. – Thomas B. Modly resigned as acting Navy secretary on April 7, a day after calling the ousted captain of the coronavirus-infected USS Theodore Roosevelt “stupid” in a profanity-laced speech to the aircraft carrier’s crew.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper accepted Modly’s resignation, noting in a statement that Modly “resigned on his own accord, putting the Navy and the Sailors above self.”

Esper said he was appointing current Army Undersecretary James McPherson, a retired Navy admiral, as acting Navy secretary until a permanent secretary can be confirmed. McPherson

himself was confirmed by the Senate for the Army post only 14 days ago.

In his statement, Esper said he had “the deepest respect for anyone who serves our country, and who places the greater good above all else. Secretary Modly did that today, and I wish him all the best.”

Esper noted that the investigation which Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday had launched into the Roosevelt affair was continuing and any further action regarding its fired commander, Capt. Brett Crozier, “will wait until that investigation is completed.”

*Esper said he was appointing current Army Undersecretary James McPherson, a retired Navy admiral, as acting Navy secretary until a permanent secretary can be confirmed.*

Modly’s resignation came after a tumultuous series of events that saw him relieve Crozier from command on April 2, fly to Guam, where the ship is docked, and defend his actions in a April 6 address to the ship’s crew that was sprinkled with profanity. In that speech, Modly called Crozier “too naive or too stupid to be the commanding officer of a ship like this,” according transcripts of recordings of Modly’s remarks made by several of the carrier’s crew.

Modly later said, “I stand by every word I said,” even the profanity. However, less than 24 hours after the speech, Modly issued an apology to Crozier, to the Theodore Roosevelt’s crew and the Navy.

“Let me be clear,” Modly said in his statement of apology, “I do not think Capt. Brett Crozier is naive or stupid. I think and have always believed him to be the opposite. I believe, precisely because he is not naive and stupid, that he sent his alarming e-mail with the intention of getting into the public domain in an effort to draw public attention to the situation

on his ship.”

*Modly “resigned on his own accord, putting the Navy and the Sailors above self.”*

*Defense Secretary Mark Esper*

Crozier’s March 30 letter to dozens of Navy brass and fellow naval aviators sparked the initial controversy that ultimately led to Modly’s resignation a week later.

After three Sailors on the Roosevelt tested positive for COVID-19 – and still more were found to be infected after the carrier made a scheduled port visit at Guam – Crozier believed the carrier had inadequate space to isolate or quarantine Sailors. “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 until all could be tested for infection, isolated for the required 14 days and the ship sanitized.

The letter was leaked to the San Francisco Chronicle, which published it on March 31, gaining worldwide media attention and highlighting Crozier’s plea: “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.”

The next day, at a Pentagon press briefing, Modly said he was “disappointed” to hear those remarks but added, “We need a lot of transparency in this situation, and we need that information to flow up through the chain of command.”

On April 3, Modly ordered Crozier relieved of his command, saying he had “lost confidence in his ability to lead” during the virus outbreak. Before the letter was published, Navy leadership had already been in touch with Crozier, Modly said. The captain said he wanted his crew evacuated from the ship faster but did not relay “the various levels of alarm that I,

along with the rest of the world, learned from his letter when it was published two days later," Modly said.