

Navy Deploys Medical Personnel to Support COVID-19 Response in New Orleans, Dallas



Master Chief Hospital Corpsman Thomas Holder, assigned to a U.S. Navy Expeditionary Medical Facility, directs bus traffic as Sailors prepare to deploy from Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida, to Dallas in support of the COVID-19 response. U.S. Navy/Jacob Sippel

WASHINGTON — U.S. Navy medical personnel assigned to Expeditionary Medical Facility-M (EMF-M) have deployed as part of a U.S. Northern Command-led COVID-19 response to support civil health authorities in existing facilities in New Orleans and Dallas, the Navy said in a release.

[See: New York Governor Asks for Comfort to Take COVID-19 Patients](#)

The first 50 personnel with EMF-M deployed to New Orleans on April 1, with about 60 more arriving on April 4. They will work at the temporary federal medical station at Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans.

In addition, more than 170 personnel deployed to Dallas to work in a temporary federal medical station established there to assist local medical personnel.

Personnel assigned to Navy EMFs are trained to provide medical support, such as acute care and emergency care, and will work with local health authorities to support community need.

President Grants New York Governor's Request for Hospital Ship Comfort to Take COVID-19 Patients



U.S. Marines walk along Pier 90 in New York City as part of a security detachment supporting the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Comfort. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Adelola Tinubu

ARLINGTON, Va. – The governor of New York, the state hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, wants the hospital ship USNS Comfort to switch missions and accept patients with the novel coronavirus ahead of an anticipated spike in infections and deaths.

At his daily news conference April 6 in Albany, N.Y., broadcast by numerous news outlets, Cuomo said he would call on President Trump to direct the 1,000-bed Medical Treatment Facility on board the USNS Comfort to start treating COVID-19 patients. Trump later granted Cuomo's request. A crew member on the hospital ship later tested positive for the virus, several media outlets reported.

[See: Navy Deploys Medical Personnel to New Orleans, Dallas](#)

[See: Coast Guard Oversees Disembarkation of Cruise Passengers](#)

The Comfort and the USNS Mercy, which was sent to help another overburdened medical system in Los Angeles, were designated as referral hospitals for non-COVID 19 patients, to allow local health professionals and hospitals to focus their attention and equipment, like intensive care units and ventilators, on COVID-19 patients.

However, the Comfort, docked in the Hudson River, has seen only a handful of non-COVID patients. Noting mandatory stay-at-home orders in the state, which have reduced auto accidents, crime and other activities that might require a trip to the hospital in ordinary times. “We don’t need the Comfort for non-COVID,” Cuomo said, “we need it for COVID.”



The patient transport team prepares to receive a patient aboard the hospital ship USNS Comfort while the ship is moored in New York. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sara Eshleman

President Trump raised the issue April 5 at a coronavirus task force briefing at the White House. While the ship’s mission wasn’t supposed to be for virus treatment “at all,” Trump

said, "It looks like more and more we'll be using it for that."

New York State has been the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States with 130,689 cases and 4,758 deaths. The 800-foot-long Comfort, a converted oil supertanker, can provide a range of services such as general surgeries, critical care and ward care for adults. The ship wasn't accepting obstetrics or pediatric cases, for which it had no specialists or equipment. Walk-in patients weren't permitted, and ambulances couldn't take patients directly to the Comfort. Patients first had to be transported to a city hospital for evaluation, including testing for COVID-19 before they could be transported to the ship.

Pentagon officials announced April 3 that screening for care on the USNS Comfort was being modified and will occur pier-side to reduce the backlog at some of the nearby New York hospitals. The screening effort for the Comfort no longer would require a negative test, but each patient still will be screened by temperature and a short questionnaire. The Pentagon also announced that the 2,500-bed non-COVID facility set up in New York's Javits Convention Center would start taking COVID-19 positive patients.

Capt. Patrick Amersbach, the USNS Comfort's medical commander, told reporters in a teleconference April 2 that if the mission changed, all the Comfort's beds would have to be reconfigured to keep those with the virus far apart from those not infected.

"We understand that introducing COVID-19 positive patients into the FMS environments elevates the risk of transmission to other patients and our medical providers. This decision was risk-informed and made to ensure that DoD can continue to provide these local communities the type of medical care they most need. Force health protection is a top priority and our medical professionals will have the required personal

protective equipment needed for this mission,” the Defense Department announcement said.

The shipboard coronavirus relief operation in both New York and Los Angeles is led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in coordination with U.S. Northern Command, Military Sealift Command and the U.S. Navy.

Coast Guard Oversees Disembarkation of Port Everglades Cruise Passengers; 31 Medically Evacuated



A Coast Guard Station Fort Lauderdale boat crew escorts the cruise ship Zaandam to Port Everglades on April 2. The Coast Guard has been assisting in escorting cruise ships and cruise ship tenders in and out of the Ports of Miami and Everglades. U.S. Coast Guard

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Coast Guard on April 2 helped oversee the offloading of more than 1,200 passengers from the cruise ships Zaandam and Rotterdam in Port Everglades, Florida, according to a Coast Guard Headquarters release.

This combined with one remaining disembarkation being coordinated represents the processing of more than 120 vessels in the last three weeks to remove 250,000 passengers from cruise ships due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[See: Coast Guard, Air Force, FEMA Deliver Medical Supplies to American Samoa](#)

The Coast Guard, under guidance from the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention and working with Department of Homeland Security partners Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration as well as state and local entities facilitated the safe landing, screening, quarantine and repatriation of these passengers. Many were brought to safe harbor in the U.S. when international ports refused entry.

"We commend the decision by the cruise industry to cease operations. However, pausing a global tourist industry does not happen instantaneously or easily."

Vice Admiral Dan Abel, Coast Guard deputy commandant for Operations

Most of the cruise line industry announced a voluntarily suspension of operations from U.S. ports of call on March 13, and the CDC issued a "no sail" order on March 14 to all cruise ships that had not voluntarily suspended operations.

"We commend the decision by the cruise industry to cease operations. However, pausing a global tourist industry does not happen instantaneously or easily," said Vice Admiral Dan Abel, Coast Guard deputy commandant for operations.

The drawdown of passenger operations is a major milestone, but it does not eliminate U.S. government concerns for cruise ships and their crews.

Today, there are 114 cruise ships, carrying 93,000 crew members, either in or near U.S. ports and waters. This includes 73 cruise ships, with 52,000 crew members, moored or anchored in U.S. ports and anchorages. Another 41 cruise ships, with 41,000 crew members, are underway and still in vicinity of the United States.

Former Commander of Theodore Roosevelt to Replace Ousted Skipper



Sailors aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America watch the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt get underway in formation in the Philippine Sea. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Jomark A. Almazan

ARLINGTON, Va. – The most recent former commander of the USS Theodore Roosevelt will replace the aircraft carrier's ousted skipper, Capt. Brett Crozier, who was dismissed April 2 after his plea to the U.S. Navy for more help dealing with a shipboard coronavirus outbreak went public.

Rear Adm. Select Carlos Sardiello, who commanded the Teddy Roosevelt from July 2017 until last November, will replace the

man who took over from him just five months ago – as soon as Sardiello can reach Guam, where the carrier is docked.

Until that time, Capt. Dan Keeler, the carrier's executive officer, is in command. Several videos posted on social media on April 3 show large crowds of Theodore Roosevelt personnel cheering for Crozier as he departs down the carrier's gangway alone. Thousands of the TR's 4,900 personnel have been offloaded, isolated and tested on Guam to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.



Rear Adm. Select Carlos Sardiello, captain of the Theodore Roosevelt from July 2017 until last November, will assume command of the aircraft carrier again following the ouster of Capt. Brett Crozier. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Becca Winberry

Sardiello "is extremely well-acquainted with the ship, many members of its crew and the operations and capabilities of the ship itself," acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly told an April 2 press briefing where he announced Crozier's removal.

Sardiello "is the best person in the Navy right now to take command under these circumstances," Modly said.

A few days after three of the TR's sailors tested positive for COVID-19 and were evacuated by air, the carrier made a scheduled port visit at Guam, where the number testing positive grew to more than 100. Most of those Sailors have minor or no symptoms and none have been hospitalized.

In a four-page March 30 letter to Navy leadership, Crozier said that the TR had inadequate space to isolate or quarantine Sailors in keeping with guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 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 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.

At a Pentagon press briefing the following day, Modly said he was "disappointed" to hear of Crozier's remarks but avoided saying whether the captain would be fired for going outside normal channels to draw attention to his ship's plight. "We need a lot of transparency in this situation, and we need that information to flow up through the chain of command," Modly said.

However, at the April 2 briefing, also attended by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, Modly said he was ordering Crozier removed from his command because he had "lost confidence in [Crozier's] ability to lead" the Roosevelt during the virus outbreak. Before Crozier's letter was published, Navy leadership had been in touch with the captain, Modly said. Crozier said he wanted his crew evacuated from the carrier 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," Modly said.

Crozier “had allowed the complexity of his challenge with the COVID breakout on the ship to overwhelm his ability to act professionally, when acting professionally was what was needed most.”

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly

Nor had Crozier discussed the situation with his immediate superior, the carrier strike group’s commander, Rear Adm. Stuart Baker, who was on board the TR “right down the passageway from him,” Modly said. The secretary also complained that Crozier had not encrypted the letter, which was sent over nonsecure, unclassified e-mail outside the chain of command that raised questions about the operational capabilities and security of the aircraft carrier.

After discussions in person and by teleconference with Gilday, the commanders of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the 7th Fleet, Navy Surgeon General Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham and others, Modly said he concluded Crozier “had allowed the complexity of his challenge with the COVID breakout on the ship to overwhelm his ability to act professionally, when acting professionally was what was needed most.”

Modly said Gilday has directed Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert Burke to investigate the circumstances and climate of the entire Pacific Fleet “to help determine what may have contributed to this breakdown in the chain of command.”

Chao, Buzby Conference With

Maritime Industry Leaders Over COVID-19



The Henry J. Kaiser-class underway replenishment oiler USNS Yukon prepares to conduct a loading with the commercial tanker MT Empire State. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Patrick W. Menah Jr.

WASHINGTON – Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao and Maritime Administrator Mark H. Buzby held a teleconference with maritime industry leaders on April 2 to discuss the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on the industry, according to an April 2 MARAD release.

Chao and Buzby discussed the crisis with chief executive officers, presidents and other senior officials of the industry.

“During the call, Secretary Chao voiced her support for the maritime industry and the challenges they face at this time,” the release said.

Did you know there are about 70 civilian mariners aboard the

USNS Comfort supporting the Navy doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals. Andrew Chen, chief mate, helps guide the ship from the bridge as it arrives in New York City. pic.twitter.com/ED4Qu2IBJP

– DOT Maritime Administration (@DOTMARAD) [April 2, 2020](#)

“Secretary Chao and Administrator Buzby briefed maritime industry partners on departmental activities concerning COVID-19 and provided industry leaders the opportunity to share their insights, questions and concerns with the secretary, [Department of Transportation], MARAD and other government interagency Partners. Topics discussed included the overall status of maritime industry operations, including personnel [staff/contractors], any disruptions, and [the outbreak’s] impact on the cargo movement in the U.S. and overseas.”

Captain of COVID-19-Plagued Aircraft Carrier Relieved of Command



Capt. Brett Crozier addresses the crew for the first time as commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt during a change-of-command ceremony in November on the ship's flight deck. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Sean Lynch

ARLINGTON, Va. – The commander of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt – whose letter to U.S. Navy brass about leadership's slow response to a coronavirus outbreak that endangered his crew was leaked to a San Francisco newspaper – has been relieved of his post.

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly announced April 2 that the carrier's commander, Capt. Brett Crozier, was being relieved of command of the ship, now docked in Guam, where nearly 100 Sailors tested positive for the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

[See: New York, L.A. Hospital Ships Brace for Expected Wave of Patients](#)

In a hastily called press briefing, Modly said Crozier was not fired in retaliation for his letter but because the secretary had lost confidence in his leadership. Crozier "had allowed

the complexity of his challenge with the [COVID-19] breakout on the ship to overwhelm his ability to act professionally, when acting professionally was what was needed.”

On March 30, in a four-page letter to Navy leadership, Crozier said that his ship had inadequate space to isolate or quarantine Sailors in keeping with guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Navy.

Crozier “had allowed the complexity of his challenge with the [COVID-19] breakout on the ship to overwhelm his ability to act professionally, when acting professionally was what was needed.”

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly

“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 the 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. The Chronicle article, which gained wide 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.”

Reaction to Crozier’s April 2 dismissal was swift from at least some leaders on Capitol Hill, where Democrats on the House Armed Services Committee – including its chairman, Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.) – decried the move. “While Captain Crozier clearly went outside the chain of command,” the congressmen wrote in a statement, his dismissal “is a destabilizing move that will likely put our service members at greater risk and jeopardize our fleet’s readiness.”



Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Michael Lusk takes a swab sample for COVID-19 testing aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt on April 1 with the ship docked in Guam. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Dartañon D. De La Garza

At an April 1 press briefing at the Pentagon, Modly declined to say whether Crozier would be fired for going outside channels to draw attention to his ship's plight. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday also declined to comment on the fate of Crozier's command of the Theodore Roosevelt.

Modly noted that Crozier stayed within Navy channels by sending his letter up the chain of command and added that the special medical team which deployed to the Roosevelt echoed some of the captain's concerns.

"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,” Modly said at the briefing.

New York, L.A. Hospital Ships See Few Patients But Brace for Expected Wave



Sailors practice patient transfer from the pier onto the hospital ship USNS Comfort as they prepare to admit patients in New York in support of the nation's COVID-19 response efforts. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sara Eshleman

ARLINGTON, Va. — Both commanders of medical operations on the two Military Sealift Command hospital ships sent to ease the load of non-coronavirus cases at hard-pressed local hospitals in Los Angeles and New York City said their staffs have

treated only a handful of patients so far.

Capt. John Rotruck, commander of the Medical Treatment Facility USNS Mercy in Los Angeles, and Capt. Patrick Amersbach, the Medical Treatment Facility USNS Comfort commander in New York, told an April 2 Pentagon press conference by phone that their vessels were rushed to both cities to be in place before hospitals were overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients so, as Rotruck said, “when capacity demand really increases, we’ll be ready.”

[See: Navy dismisses outspoken captain of the USS Theodore Roosevelt](#)

The Mercy, based in San Diego, reached L.A. on March 27 and received its first patient March 29. Since then, 15 patients have been transferred from local hospitals to the hospital ship. Five have been discharged and 10 others are still being treated on board.

That effective throughput showed the hospital ships could act as “a relief valve for local hospitals,” Rotruck said. Otherwise, if the ships filled up “we would be of little use to the local hospitals.” The Norfolk, Virginia-based Comfort set sail six days ahead of original plan on March 28 and reached New York two days later. Comfort staff have treated 30 people since April 1.



Lt. Cmdr. Nevin Yazici demonstrates how to properly fit an N95 respiratory protective device aboard the Comfort in New York. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sara Eshleman

"We were brought into New York City as quickly as possible," Amersbach said, to "accept COVID-19-free patients to take pressure off local health systems before the wave hit."

Both huge vessels can provide a full spectrum of services, including general surgeries, critical care and ward care for adults. That will allow local health care professionals to focus on treating COVID-19 patients and for shore-based hospitals to use their intensive care units and ventilators for threatening those patients. Neither ship is accepting obstetrics or pediatric patients, which the captains said would require more specialists and equipment than the ships have for their primary mission.



Aviation Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Justin Cosgrove participates in morning colors aboard the Comfort while the ship is moored in New York City in support of the nation's COVID-19 response efforts. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sara Eshleman

Rotruck said the cases doctors on the Mercy have treated ranged from traumatic accident injuries to gastrointestinal, heart and lung issues. In both cities, all patients are referred by local hospitals to a central command center for disposition and are screened and tested for COVID-19 before they can come aboard the ships.

Medical staff on the ships, who include Navy reservists as well as active-duty personnel, were screened for COVID-19 before they came on board and any new staff will have to self-isolate in New York or Los Angeles for 14 days before boarding either ship.

If higher authorities changed the ships' mission to treat COVID-19 patients, Rotruck speculated that Mercy would have to "transfer all the non-COVID-19 patients off the ship and

become a 100% COVID operation.” Amersbach said if the mission changed, all the Comfort’s beds would have to be reconfigured to keep those with the virus far apart from those not infected.

Rotruck said the apparent deliberate derailment of a railroad locomotive near the port area where the Mercy is berthed did not affect the ship’s staff, patients or services. “It happened well outside of our fence line,” said Rotruck, adding that the Navy and Defense Department will adjust force protection procedures if there are additional security concerns.

In New York City, where supplies of personal protection equipment (PPE) for local medical staff are running critically low, Amersbach said the Comfort hasn’t received any requests for supplies or equipment from hospitals, adding that such requests would be forwarded to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “We currently have enough PPE, equipment and stores on board,” he said, “at least for the next couple of weeks, depending on how many patients we get aboard the ship.”

The two hospital ships aren’t the only Navy Department responses to the medical needs of the civilian population, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly told a press briefing on April 1.

Scalable, modular, rapidly erectable shelters, known as Expeditionary Medical Facilities, were sent to temporary medical stations at convention centers in Dallas and New Orleans. Marine Corps Systems Command and the Naval Information Warfare Center, Pacific, were designing 3-D parts to assist the University of California-San Diego convert ventilators to handle multiple patients, Modly said.

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://t.co/dW7giW07PL)

– 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.

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.

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."