

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, poolees 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.

Medical Center Seeks Marine Corps Command's Help to Manufacture Ventilator Splitter



U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Ricler Magsayo calibrates a ventilator at Camp Kinser in Okinawa, Japan, on March 23. The University of California San Diego Medical Center has asked for Marine Corps Systems Command's help in making a ventilator splitter part via 3-D printing. U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Terry Wong

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. – The University of California San Diego Medical Center has requested Marine Corps Systems Command's (MCSC) assistance to help medical professionals as they deal with the evolving crisis of COVID-19, the command said in a release.

On March 16, Dr. Sidney Merritt, an anesthesiologist at UCSD

Medical Center, contacted MCSC's Advanced Manufacturing Operations Cell and requested help in coordinating 3-D printer assets to design parts to enable the simultaneous ventilation of multiple patients.

AMOC sought collaboration with the Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific Reverse Engineering, Science and Technology for Obsolescence, Restoration and Evaluation Lab to rapidly design, print, test and evaluate prototype ventilator splitters using various materials.

The AMOC team also worked with the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery for support in evaluating, certifying and approving the parts prior to delivery to the medical center.

On March 18, Merritt provided design files for the ventilator splitter based on a successful test print conducted by the UCSD engineering team. UCSD requested assistance in printing ventilator splitters in higher resolution and with diverse materials that could meet specific design requirements.

After receiving the design files, AMOC and the NIWC Pacific RESTORE lab printed several prototypes using different materials. In less than a day, AMOC used its industrial printer in Quantico, Virginia, and the RESTORE Lab employed its organic printers to produce initial prototypes.

The 3-D-printed ventilator splitters were scanned to ensure accuracy with the design files and then brought to UCSD Medical Center for fit testing and further design analysis.

AMOC's reputation in advanced manufacturing has grown since its establishment in 2019. The cell has demonstrated the ability to produce 3-D-printed parts and provide other sustainment and manufacturing solutions. When called upon, the AMOC can produce parts in a fraction of the time it takes traditional manufacturers.

"AMOC's response to this situation demonstrates how additive

manufacturing can respond quickly to supply chain disruptions and rapidly prototype, evaluate and test new solutions to meet emerging urgent requirements,” said Scott Adams, AMOC lead at Marine Corps Systems Command.

The rapid response by AMOC and the NIWC Pacific RESTORE lab to UCSD Medical Center’s request for support indicates how the Department of the Navy is prepared to respond to the medical community during the COVID-19 crisis.

“I couldn’t be prouder of the Marine Corps and NIWC Pacific team,” said Carly Jackson, the chief technology officer at Naval Information Warfare Systems Command. “We are demonstrating the power, agility and speed of response that our Naval research and development centers bring to bear in times of national need.”

Hospital Ship Comfort Arrives in New York City



The USNS Comfort leaves Naval Station Norfolk on March 28. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jonathan Clay

NORFOLK, Va. – The Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Comfort arrived in New York City on March 30 in support of the nation’s COVID-19 response efforts, the U.S. 2nd Fleet announced.

While in New York, the ship will serve as a hospital for non-COVID-19 patients admitted to shore-based hospitals and will provide medical care to include general surgeries, critical care and ward care for adults, allowing local health

professionals to focus on treating COVID-19 patients and for hospitals there to use their intensive care units and ventilators for those patients.

Comfort is a seagoing medical treatment facility that has more than 1,200 personnel embarked for the New York mission, including U.S. Navy medical and support staff assembled from 22 commands as well as over 70 civil mariners.

“The USNS Comfort arrives in New York City this morning with more than 1,100 medical personnel who are ready to provide safe, high-quality health care to non-COVID patients,” said Capt. Patrick Amersbach, commanding officer of the USNS Comfort Military Treatment Facility (MTF). “We are ready and grateful to serve the needs of our nation.”

Comfort’s primary mission is to provide an afloat, mobile, acute surgical medical facility to the U.S. military that is flexible, capable and uniquely adaptable to support expeditionary warfare. Comfort’s secondary mission is to provide hospital services to support U.S. disaster relief and humanitarian operations worldwide.

“Like her sister ship, USNS Mercy, which recently moored in Los Angeles, this great ship will support civil authorities by increasing medical capacity and collaboration for medical assistance,” said Rear Adm. John Mustin, vice commander of U.S. Fleet Forces Command. “Not treating COVID-19 patients ... but by acting as a relief valve for other urgent needs, freeing New York’s hospitals and medical professionals to focus on the pandemic.”

“This USNS Comfort team of Sailors, Marines and civilian mariners came together during the transit to New York City and our medical professionals are ready to begin receiving patients from local hospitals tomorrow,” said Capt. Joseph O’Brien, mission commander of Task Force New York City. “Our personnel are our strength – the men and women of our

military services accomplish incredible things every day, and I am confident in their abilities as we start the next phase of this mission.”

The ship expects to begin receiving patients 24 hours after arriving in New York. All patient transfers will be coordinated with local hospitals, thus ensuring a consistent handoff of care between medical providers. Patients will not be accepted on a walk-on basis and should not come to the pier expecting to receive care.

“The last time that this great hospital ship was here was in the wake of 9/11, where she served as respite and comfort for our first responders working around the clock,” Mustin said. “Our message to New Yorkers – now your Navy has returned, and we are with you, committed in this fight.”

Marines Grapple with Maintaining Readiness Amid COVID-19 Restrictions



Marine provost marshals take precautions against COVID-19 at Marine Corps Air Ground Center in Twentynine Palms, California. U.S. Marine Corps

ARLINGTON, Va. – Restrictions imposed by the battle against the coronavirus are presenting the U.S. Marine Corps with an array of new challenges – from maintaining grooming standards to how, when and where America’s force in readiness can train safely in a pandemic.

In a joint Pentagon press briefing on March 26 with Marine

Commandant

Gen. David Berger, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said the Marines have scaled back training at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms and the Mountain Warfare Training Center, both in California. They also have canceled training with foreign partners and much of the Headquarters Marine Corps staff have been ordered to work from home.

[See: More Cases on Roosevelt as COVID-19 Spreads Across Navy, Marine Corps](#)

Promotion boards can spread out over several rooms and shooters can spread out on the firing line of a pistol range, but “in a live-fire exercise you can only do so much to moderate social distancing,” Berger said.

“The Marine Corps is unique,” the commandant explained. “We are mandated by law to be the nation’s most ready force.” He has given local commanders leeway to operate as they see best depending on the local situation rather than issuing a blanket, Corps-wide list of restrictions. When it comes to training, Berger said, “commanders are taking measures that make sense but also making sure their units are trained and ready to go.”

“This is a unique time. We’re trying to find unique answers. It’s not going to be the same as sitting in the bleachers at graduation. There’s no way to replicate that.”

Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Troy Black

Basic training graduations have been closed to all

outsiders, including family, to prevent spreading disease. "It's driving us to be pretty creative," Berger said. The ceremonies are now televised and digitally recorded for each new Marine.

"This is a unique time. We're trying to find unique answers," said Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Troy Black, but he conceded "it's not going to be the same as sitting in the bleachers at graduation. There's no way to replicate that."

Although leaders have halted face-to-face meetings between recruiters and enlistment prospects, the Marines have not stopped training or bringing new recruits to boot camps in California and South Carolina. Both facilities have begun screening incoming recruits before they depart from processing stations and when they arrive at the recruit depot. Any showing symptoms are isolated. At least two have tested positive for the virus, but no drill instructors have, Modly said.

"Everybody's still getting their head shaved as long as the barbers come to work," Berger said, "but there will come that time when it gets worse and worse and worse, where barbers won't come to work. In that case we'll have to make a decision: 'Do Marines cut Marines' hair?' Commanders at both of our recruit depots have thought their way through it."

Berger noted headquarters hasn't said grooming standards are relaxed for a given period. "What we have said is commanders have the latitude

to make adjustments based on what's available at your location."

More Cases on Roosevelt as COVID-19 Spreads Across Navy, Marine Corps



Sailors prepare surgical equipment to be sterilized aboard the hospital ship USNS Mercy. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Luke Cunningham

ARLINGTON, Va. – COVID-19 cases are on the rise among U.S.

Navy personnel, including five more Sailors diagnosed with the novel

coronavirus aboard the deployed aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt,

according to acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly.

The news brings the number of Roosevelt crew members testing positive for COVID-19 to eight and raises the total number of infected active-duty

uniformed Navy personnel to 104, Modly told a Pentagon press briefing March 26,

adding that 23 Navy civilian employees, 16 family members and 19 civilian

contractors also have the virus.

He acknowledged that those totals indicate the Navy has the highest number – about one third – of all coronavirus cases in the military. By

contrast, the Marine Corps, which keeps a separate tally, has reported 31 cases

of COVID-19 among active-duty personnel, including the first service member working in the Pentagon to test positive. Also, five civilian Marine Corps employees, five dependents and three contractors also have tested positive.



A sign put up to limit the spread of COVID-19 is displayed in the Marine Corps Exchange at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina on March 23. U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Taylor Smith

"I think we are trending higher. Some data that I saw this morning showed that we are probably a third of all the active-duty people that have tested positive," said Modly, adding "I don't have a reason for that."

While the Navy is deployed around the world and has large concentrations of people in places like San Diego and Norfolk, Virginia, Modly said any estimated explanations were just speculation. "We have not done the forensics yet on where these individual Sailors contracted the disease and, until we know that, it would be irresponsible for me to say why we think this is happening," he said.

All eight infected Sailors evacuated from the Roosevelt to Guam had mild symptoms and were not hospitalized but they are quarantined, Modly said. In a change from earlier plans, he said 100% of the nearly 5,000 crew members on board the carrier would be tested for the coronavirus "to ensure we are able to contain whatever spread might have occurred on the ship." He stressed the ship is operationally capable and "can do its mission if required to do so."

The Roosevelt is making a previously-scheduled port visit to Guam, where testing the whole crew will be completed. All crew will be confined to the ship or the pier area while in port. In the meantime, the ship has 800 testing kits, with more on the way by air, and some limited ability to process the samples. Sailors who test positive will be transported to the U.S. Naval Hospital Guam for further evaluation and treatment as necessary.

The infected Marine stationed at the Pentagon was last in the building on March 13 and tested positive on March 24 and is in isolation at home. His workplace has been cleaned by response crews. Both Marine Corps recruit depots have begun screening incoming recruits and at least two have tested positive for the virus, but no drill instructors have. Two other Marines stationed at Parris Island have tested positive, but they were already in quarantine when their tests came back, Modly said.

The Navy has accelerated preparations for the hospital ship USNS Comfort to sail to New York City to help relieve local hospitals' non-COVID-19 workload. Originally planned to depart from Norfolk, Virginia, on April 3, "in all likelihood she's getting underway this weekend," Modly said. "Hopefully she'll be in New York by the early part of next week," he added. The Navy's other hospital ship, USNS Mercy, has been deployed to perform similar duties treating non-coronavirus cases in Los Angeles.

Geurts: Navy Acting to Shore Up Industrial Base to Ease

Virus Impact on Readiness



Contractors aboard the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford test a lower stage weapons elevator. Navy Assistant Secretary James F. Geurts says the sea service is working to make sure that remaining work on the Ford and construction of the Columbia-class submarine is minimally disrupted during the COVID-19 outbreak. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Riley McDowell

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is taking active measures to ease the impact of the COVID-19 virus on the operations and finance of its defense industrial base to minimize disruptions to its acquisition and readiness, the service's top acquisition official said.

James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, speaking March 25 in a teleconference with reporters, said the Navy is "using all the levers we have" such as moving up contract awards, accelerating contract payments and establishing baselines to compare pre-virus versus post-virus contractor performance.

[See: Port Visits Cancelled, Submariners' Health Monitored to Contain Coronavirus](#)

Geurts said his effort is focused of 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.

Geurts said he is communicating with various stakeholders such as shipbuilder and aircraft builder presidents and Navy

shipyards, regional maintenance centers and fleet readiness centers to take the pulse of operations and address concerns at all levels, including reducing barriers and freeing up funding. He said he is especially concerned about the resilience of the many small supplier companies that fill out the industrial supply chain.

The Navy's concerns about major shipyards vary by site, but Geurts said the sea service is "seeing a tightening on the supply base as smaller shops deal with their local situations. We've got a pretty good view of that with some of the real-time systems we are using. I do expect some delay or disruption."

Geurts said a key initiative was to establish baselines of the performance of current programs before the pandemic hit to understand the effects of delay and disruption with delays that were already incurred in programs and work through those issues on the back side of the pandemic and adjust as necessary.

He said the Navy is not slowing down in its contracting activity and is, in fact, accelerating it "wherever we can to get that demand signal in" so that there is meaningful work waiting as the pandemic ends to avoid a lag effect in getting back to work at full speed.

Regarding ship repair periods, the secretary said the Navy is reducing the normal 10% payment withholdings across the board.

For claims that have been adjudicated but not yet paid, the Navy is looking to pay those out, and where claims have not yet been adjudicated, it will attempt to accelerate adjudication of those claims.

"On the [contract] penalty side, we will continue to understand where those penalties are and work through how to deal with those penalties," Geurts said.

Geurts said his team is 90% to 95% dispersed and teleworking but he is “driving the team to accelerate” and he praised its dedication to performance despite the disruption of the virus.

The secretary said the Navy is working to make sure there is no or only minimal disruption to the construction of the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine and the remaining work on the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford.

He said he has “not seen any major impacts to that work [on the Columbia SSBN] yet but we are tracking it very closely.”

Port Visits Cancelled, Submariners' Health Monitored to Contain Coronavirus Spread at Sea



Retail Services Specialist 3rd Class Thuy Nguyen and Airman Manuel Lozano stand watch in front of the barge quarterdeck of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard to screen oncoming traffic for COVID-19 symptoms. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Devin Kates

ARLINGTON, Va. – Nonessential port visits by U.S. Navy ships have been cancelled and Sailors' health aboard the nuclear deterrent submarine

force is being closely monitored, top officials said in the latest report on

combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said he believed

“every port visit, with the exception of ships that need to pull in for maintenance or resupply,” had been cancelled. He was sure with “high certainty” that all ships in the Pacific Ocean were no longer making scheduled port calls and crews of ships that do make stops would be confined to the pier area while in port.

[See: Ship Commissionings on Track, But Ceremonies Delayed](#)

In a March 24 press briefing, Gilday and acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly announced that three Sailors deployed in the Pacific aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt were diagnosed with COVID-19 and were being evacuated from the carrier. It was the first appearance of the novel coronavirus on a deployed ship at sea, Modly said, adding that all those who encountered the three sick individuals were being quarantined aboard the Roosevelt. There were no plans to recall the carrier or any other deployed ship, Gilday said.

“We have not missed any operational commitment in the Navy at this time,” he said, adding that the impact to force readiness has been low “but that’s not to say that this couldn’t spike at any given time. We continue to watch this very closely in every ship, squadron and submarine.”

Gilday said all crews of the ballistic missile submarine force – which forms the maritime leg of the nuclear triad of submarines, bombers and ground-based missiles – undergo enhanced medical screenings and 14-day isolation before beginning training or deployment aboard a sub. “We have

not seen a single case yet” of COVID-19 within the submarine force, Gilday said.

Elsewhere, two Navy hospital ships were being readied to ease the burden on health care workers and institutions in two cities hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, Los Angeles and New York, Modly said.



From left: Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday and Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, the Navy surgeon general, speak to the media about the ongoing efforts to combat COVID-19 while maintaining operations. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sarah Villegas
The hospital ship USNS Mercy, which is based in San Diego, was doing some initial training off the coast of California and would reach Los Angeles “within the next few days,” he said, adding that Mercy would need another 24 hours after arriving in L.A. “to prepare for how she’ll receive patients” before the sick are brought aboard. The USNS Comfort, based in Norfolk, Virginia, tasked with aiding New York City’s medical services squeezed by the surge of COVID-19 cases, is still preparing for its mission, Modly said.

Both ships will serve as referral hospitals for patients not infected with the coronavirus to allow local medical services to focus on those who are, Modly stressed. “They’re there to handle the overflow of acute trauma cases and other urgent needs, and they will not be handling pediatric or OB-GYN

cases,” the acting Navy secretary said.

“We continue to watch this very closely in every ship, squadron and submarine.”

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly

Because of the pandemic, the Navy has postponed, until 2021, this summer’s Large-Scale Exercise 2020, the first of a planned return to annual large exercises involving several strike groups. Modly said no decision has been made yet on scrubbing Hawaii-based Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), the world’s largest international maritime exercise that runs every two years in June and July.

Both Modly and Gilday said they expect COVID-19 shutdowns will challenge work tempo at Navy and private shipyards. While the work of the private shipyards is essential in producing and repairing ships “we are also concerned about the health of their people. We don’t want them putting them at risk, either,” Modly said, noting Navy officials were talking with company executives daily.

Meanwhile, large prime contractors were, in effect, creating task forces to monitor the supply chains “to keep all of those production lines running and to see where we might be incurring risk out through, 2021, so that we can then prioritize what type of work we need to do,” Gilday said.



Hospitalman Katelynn Kavanagh sanitizes equipment aboard the USNS Mercy on March 24. The hospital ship is deploying to Los Angeles in support of the nation's COVID-19 response efforts. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan M. Breeden

Navy Ship Commissionings on Track Despite Pandemic, But Ceremonies Are Delayed



Sonar Technician (Submarine) 1st Class Ryun Lewis (right) demonstrates line-handling procedures to U.S. Naval Sea Cadets during a tour of the Virginia-class attack submarine USS Delaware March 7. The Delaware is moored pier side at Naval Station Norfolk and will be commissioned administratively due to COVID-19 restrictions. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cameron Stoner

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy plans to put two Virginia-class attack submarines in commission in April despite the COVID-19 pandemic, but the ceremonies marking the events will be delayed.

“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 spokesperson for Naval Sea Systems Command, said in a March 24 e-mail to *Seapower*.

“The commissioning of both ships will take place administratively, and the ships will begin normal operations with the fleet.”

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 submarines were built jointly by General Dynamics' Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls' Newport News Shipbuilding.

"We greatly value the support of all those who were planning to attend, and we will look for a future opportunity to commemorate these special events with the sponsors, crews and commissioning committees," Couch said.

Theodore Roosevelt Becomes First Navy Ship at Sea with COVID-19 Cases



An F/A-18F Super Hornet lands on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. The Navy reported on March 24 three cases of the coronavirus on the ship. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Nicholas V. Huynh ARLINGTON, Va. – In the first case of COVID-19 detected aboard a U.S. Navy ship at sea, three people quarantined with the coronavirus aboard

the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Pacific Ocean have been evacuated for further treatment, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly announced.

"These are our first three cases of COVID-19 on a ship that's deployed," Modly told a Pentagon press briefing on March 24. "We've identified all those folks they've had contact with, and we're quarantining them as well," he added.

To date, 86 cases of COVID-19 have been detected among people connected with the Navy, including 57 uniformed personnel, 13 civilian employees, 11 dependents and five contractors, Modly said.

"We've begun to take a look inside the ship, how we can isolate and contain as best we can."

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday

The Roosevelt left its last port of call, Da Nang, Vietnam, 15 days ago and has been self-quarantined at sea for 14 days, the incubation period of the virus, a procedure required of all Navy ships at sea since the disease began to spread, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said. He said it would be difficult to definitively link the outbreak on the Roosevelt to the port visit in Vietnam.

"We've had aircraft flying to and from the ship, so we just don't want to say it was that particular port visit," Gilday noted, adding that enhanced medical screening of the crew was done after leaving port.

The CNO said the three Sailors who tested positive for COVID-19 were not showing symptoms that would necessarily require hospitalization, only an elevated body temperature and body aches. However, leaders moved quickly to isolate them and evacuate them by aircraft to a Defense Department hospital in the Pacific region, which Gilday declined to identify.

"We've begun to take a look inside the ship, how we can

isolate and contain as best we can,” Gilday said, adding there is testing capability on the ship, including the capacity to test for non-COVID but influenza-related incidents.

The CNO said Navy officials are working with the Roosevelt’s commander to assess the situation both medically and in terms of the carrier’s mission. “We’re taking this day-by-day, and we’re being very deliberate how we do it,” Gilday said. “We are not at a position right now to say we have to pull that ship in – or to take that ship off the front line.”

Given the busy comings and goings on an aircraft carrier, including helicopters delivering supplies and personnel, Gilday was asked if the Navy is planning any change in procedure for other deployed carriers. He said there were no specifics yet but noted that after every COVID-19 case is detected, practices and procedures are examined to determine “the dos and the don’ts we can quickly promulgate fleetwide.”

Hospital Ship Mercy Deploying to Los Angeles



Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest forklift driver Steve King moves pallets of supplies to be craned aboard Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) at

Naval Base San Diego, March 21, 2020. Mercy is preparing to deploy in support of the nation's COVID-19 response efforts. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jessica Paulauskas

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The secretary of defense said the Military Sealift Command's hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) is deploying to Los Angeles to relieve the city's hospitals of some of their non-COVID-19 patient burden as they deal with the virus pandemic.

During a March 23 news conference at the Pentagon, Secretary Mark Esper said the Mercy was departing its layberth in San Diego the same day for Los Angeles. The sister ship USNS Comfort would deploy at a later date for New York City for the same mission. The two ships will not be caring for COVID-19 patients but will treat acute care and surgery patients with other needs to relieve local hospitals that are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Esper said that some field hospitals are being readied for similar missions and that some hotels and college dormitories may be put in service as well for patient care.

He said that to date 137 Defense Department personnel had been diagnosed with COVID-19 and that one department civilian had died.

During a separate Pentagon news conference on the same date, Rear Adm. Timothy H. Weber, commander, Navy Medical Forces Pacific, said that 800 medical personnel were being embarked on the Mercy and were being drawn from eight military treatment facilities, primarily from naval hospitals and clinics in San Diego, Camp Pendleton, California, Twentynine Palms, California, Bremerton, Washington, and Oak Harbor, Washington. A total of 58 Navy Reserve medical personnel – all volunteers – also are being embarked. Weber said that none had been involved in treatment of COVID-19 patients.



Master-at-Arms 3rd Class Ashlee McCasland, Master-at-Arms 2nd Class Jonathan Shaw and Senior Chief Master-at-Arms Lou Canton prepare pallets of supplies to be loaded aboard Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) at Naval Base San Diego, March 21. U.S. NAVY / Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist Mike Jones

Also at the news conference, Capt. John R. Rotruck, commanding officer of the Mercy's Medical Treatment Facility, said the ship would dock at Los Angeles "within the week" and will start care of the local population the following day. He said the ship will operate under the control commander, Destroyer Squadron 21, and operate for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Rotruck said the Mercy will embark a total of 1,128 personnel, including the ship's civilian crew, the military medical treatment team and a few civilian contractors. The Mercy has 1,000 hospital beds and will be operating nine of the 12 operating rooms on the ship. He said the embarked crew will be screened for COVID-19 but not tested unless needed.

Rotruck said the Mercy will offer a broad range of medical services but will not be staffed to handle obstetric or pediatric cases. The ship has a fully capable blood bank on board.

"The Mercy is ready to go," said the Mercy's master, Capt. Jonathan Olmsted, also in the conference. He said the Mercy will be underway for about two days to runs some tests of its systems before docking pierside in the Port of Los Angeles.

Rotruck said the time underway at sea will be used to train the medical team.

"Our Mercy team is ready to deploy and support FEMA and local relief agencies against the COVID-19 pandemic," he said. "I have an amazing team, and we are truly honored to answer the nations' call to protect the health of the American people."