

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.

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.

Navy Awards \$200 Million Contract to Upgrade USS Boxer



U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom pilots with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 163 (Reinforced), 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, demonstrate an unguided missile attack run at the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer during an air power demonstration. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Adam Dublinske

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.

Attack Submarine USS Delaware Joins Fleet



Sonar Technician (Submarine) 1st Class Ryun Lewis (center) gives a tour of the Delaware last month to U.S. Naval Sea Cadets with the sub moored pier side at Naval Station Norfolk as the Virginia-class boat prepared for its April 4 commissioning. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cameron Stoner

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy commissioned USS Delaware, the 18th Virginia-class attack submarine, on April 4, according to

a Navy release.

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 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.

"This Virginia-class fast-attack submarine will continue the proud naval legacy of the state of Delaware and the ships that have borne her name," acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly said in the release.

Vice Adm. Daryl Caudle, commander of Navy Submarine Forces, said he is pleased to welcome the ship to the sub fleet and contribute to Navy undersea warfighting capability.



The Virginia-class attack submarine USS Delaware transits the Atlantic Ocean after departing Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding division during sea trials last

August. U.S. Navy via Ashley Cowan of HII

"The U.S. Navy values the support of all those who contributed to today's momentous milestone and will look for a future opportunity to commemorate this special event," Caudle said. "The sailors of USS Delaware hail from every corner of the nation and from every walk of life. This crew, and the crews who follow, will rise to every challenge with unmatched bravery and perseverance to ensure the U.S. Submarine Force remains the best in the world."

The ship's sponsor, Jill Biden, spouse of former Vice President Joe Biden, a Democratic candidate for president, offered congratulations to everyone who played a role in delivering USS Delaware to service.

"I know this submarine and her crew of courageous sailors will carry the steadfast strength of my home state wherever they go," she said. "The sailors who fill this ship are the very best of the Navy, and as you embark on your many journeys, please know that you and those whom you love are in my thoughts."

Delaware's commanding officer, Cmdr. Matthew Horton, said the commissioning marks the culmination of six years of hard work by the men and women who constructed the submarine and are preparing it to become a warship. He thanked the crew and their families, Jill Biden, the USS Delaware Commissioning Committee and the Navy League of Hampton Roads for their work and support.

"As we do our part to maintain the nation's undersea supremacy well into the future, today marks a milestone for the Sailors who serve aboard USS Delaware. Whether they have been here for her initial manning three years ago, or have just reported, they all are strong, capable submariners ready to sail the nation's newest warship into harm's way," Horton said.

This is the first time in nearly 100 years the name "Delaware"

has been used for a U.S. Navy vessel. It is the seventh Navy ship, and first sub, to bear the name of the state. The boat is 377 feet long, has a 34-foot beam and will be able to dive to depths greater than 800 feet and operate at speeds in excess of 25 knots submerged. It will operate for more than 30 years without ever refueling. Its keel was laid on April 30, 2016, and was christened during a ceremony on Oct. 20, 2018. It is the final Block III Virginia-class sub before Block IV deliveries begin.

Bollinger Delivers 38th Fast-Response Cutter, Harold Miller, to Coast Guard



The fast-response cutter Harold Miller, delivered to the U.S. Coast Guard in Key West, Florida, on April 2. Bollinger Shipyards

LOCKPORT, La. – Bollinger Shipyards delivered the fast-response cutter (FRC) Harold Miller to the U.S. Coast Guard in Key West, Florida, on April 2, the company said in a release.

The cutter is the 161st vessel Bollinger has delivered to the U.S. Coast Guard over a 35-year period and the 38th FRC delivered on the current program. The Harold Miller is the third of three FRCs to be home-ported in Galveston, Texas.

“We are very proud to announce our latest FRC delivery,

especially given the unprecedented times and challenges which we're facing as a nation," said Ben Bordelon, Bollinger's president and CEO.

"For this reason, I want to commend the resilience and dedication of the 600-plus men and women who, despite the threat of global pandemic, continued to work safely and efficiently to build and deliver an exceptional, high-performance cutter to strengthen U.S. national security at a time when our nation needs us most."

"While providing the United States Coast Guard with an extremely capable and affordable asset, the Bollinger FRC program also provides tremendous benefits to the state of Louisiana, not only through highly skilled and well-paying jobs, but also through its direct and indirect spending, resulting in millions of dollars of economic benefits to the state," said Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.).

Each FRC is named for an enlisted Coast Guard hero who distinguished themselves in the line of duty. Harold Miller, a boatswain's mate second class, piloted the first wave of landing craft on Tulagi Island in the Pacific Theater during World War II and made a landing against a Japanese force on Guadalcanal Island. Miller was awarded a Silver Star by Adm. Chester Nimitz for his heroic combat actions.

The FRC is an operational game-changer, according to senior Coast Guard officials. The class is consistently being considered and utilized for a broader mission within the Coast Guard and other branches of our armed services due to the success of the platform and the FRC's expanded operational reach and capabilities, including the ability to transform and adapt to the mission.

FRCs have conducted operations as far as the Marshall Islands – a 4,400-nautical-mile trip from their homeport. Measuring 154 feet, FRCs have a flank speed of 28 knots,

state-of-the-

art command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance suite, and stern launch and recovery ramp for a 26-foot, over-the-horizon interceptor cutter boat.

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."

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.

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



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

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

At an April 1 press briefing at the White House,

Trump announced that SOUTHCOM “will increase surveillance, disruption and seizures of drug shipments and provide additional support for eradication efforts, which are going on right now at a record pace.”

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

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

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

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

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

Attending the briefing as well was Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who added: "This initiative is part of the administration's whole-of-government approach to combating the flow of illicit drugs into the United States and protecting the American people from their scourge."

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

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

Defense Secretary Mark Esper

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

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