

COVID-19 Strikes Amphib Carter Hall as Theodore Roosevelt Returns to Mission



The Harpers Ferry-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Carter Hall sits at anchor in Sepetiba Bay, Brazil, while conducting amphibious operations in support of UNITAS LX last August. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kody A. Phillips

ARLINGTON, Va. – Another novel coronavirus outbreak has been reported on a U.S. Navy warship in port: the amphibious dock landing ship USS Carter Hall.

The Carter Hall's crew of 400 was being tested for COVID-19 as a proactive measure to ensure its Sailors were a healthy, surge-capable response force for the upcoming hurricane season when several tested positive for the virus on May 23, Lt. Commander Amelia Umayam, a Fleet Force spokesperson in Norfolk, Va., confirmed in an e-mailed statement. As a matter of Defense Department policy, Umayam declined to confirm the number of cases detected on the dock landing ship.

"The crew moved ashore to begin a restriction of movement (ROM) per current Navy guidance. The crew members who have been moved ashore are being checked on each day by their leadership and are receiving deliveries of food and essential items," according to the statement.

As of June 4, the Navy still stood as the U.S. military service with the largest number of COVID-19 cases at 2,520. That compares to 6,919 for all other services and Defense Department agencies combined. The U.S. Marine Corps has had 581 cases. The Navy reported 728 active cases among uniformed personnel, only one hospitalized and 1,791 Sailors who have recovered from the virus. The Pentagon said it anticipates

providing updated numbers only until August, when it will evaluate whether such reporting is still necessary.

The 609-foot, 16,700-ton Carter Hall, which can carry a complement of 400 Marines and two air cushion landing craft, remains at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Virginia.



The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt transits the Philippine Sea on June 1. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Julian Davis

“A portion of the crew remains on board the ship to clean and maintain in port watchstanding requirements, and they’re enforcing social distancing, minimizing group gatherings, wearing PPE, and cleaning/sanitizing extensively as well as reporting up their chain of command, if they feel ill,” the statement continued.

Meanwhile, the first Navy warship to experience a COVID-19 outbreak while at sea, the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, on June 4 left Guam – where it had been sidelined for more than two months – to continue its scheduled deployment in the 7th Fleet area of operations in the Indo-Pacific.

COVID-19 was detected on board the carrier in late March, 15 days after the ship made a port call to Da Nang, Vietnam. Stopping at Guam for a scheduled visit on March 27, most of the nearly 5,000 crew were disembarked to self-isolate or receive medical treatment, while about 700 remained on board to clean the ship from bow to stern. About 1,100 crew members became infected and several were hospitalized. One Theodore Roosevelt Sailor, Aviation Ordnanceman CP0 Charles Thacker Jr., died of complications from the virus.

Testing the entire crew for COVID-19 was completed in mid-May, and they began returning to the carrier in waves after 14 days of isolation and twice testing negative for the virus. Despite

those efforts, at least 14 returning Sailors tested positive again.

On May 21, the Theodore Roosevelt began a short shakedown cruise to recertify aviation activities for Carrier Air Wing 11, which was completed June 2. After returning to Guam to pick up remaining Sailors who had tested negative for COVID-19, the carrier departed Guam's Apra Harbor, flying the iconic "Don't Give Up the Ship" flag from the port yardarm.

Sailors who did not meet the return-to-work criteria and still require additional time ashore to recover will remain in isolation on Naval Base Guam, according to Commander J. Myers Vasquez, a spokesperson for the commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet. "Once recovered, air transportation will be coordinated to move the Sailors onboard Theodore Roosevelt or to their final duty station once TR departs the area on mission," Vasquez said in a June 3 statement.

The Roosevelt returned to service while Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday mulls the fate of the carrier's former skipper, Capt. Brett Crozier, who was relieved of command on April 2 after a letter he wrote to Navy leadership – pleading for faster intervention from the chain of command to assist his crew – was leaked to a San Francisco newspaper and subsequently received worldwide media attention. The Navy investigated the command climate in the Pacific and how it could have contributed to the handling of the outbreak and Crozier. The results of that investigation have been delivered to Gilday.

Lessons learned from the Theodore Roosevelt outbreak were cited by Pentagon officials among the reasons for the swift response to an outbreak on the Arleigh-Burke class guided-missile destroyer USS Kidd – none of whose crew needed hospitalization.

The Kidd was participating in counter-narcotics operations in

the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility in the Pacific in late April when several of its Sailors began exhibiting flu-like symptoms.