Despite Navy-Wide Precautions, COVID-19 Turns up on USS Theodore Roosevelt Again

U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Stu Baker, commander, Carrier Strike Group Nine, gives blood for a serology study aimed at identifying antibodies associated with COVID-19 aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roose-velt (CVN 71) April 22, 2020. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Kaylianna Genier ARLINGTON, Va. — No new cases of COVID-19 have been reported aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, where "a small number of Sailors" tested positive for the novel coronavirus a week ago, a Navy spokesperson said Oct. 21.

The Roosevelt, the first U.S. warship to battle a COVID-19 outbreak at sea in March, was conducting routine training off the coast of California Oct. 15 when the Sailors self-reported after experiencing symptoms. They received immediate medical treatment and were transported off the ship by helicopter to Naval Air Station North Island for isolation, said Cmdr. Zach Harrell, spokesperson for Commander, Naval Air Forces. The Roosevelt, training completed, returned to its homeport at San Diego on Oct. 20.

"All members of the crew who were in close contact with the Sailors who tested positive have tested negative for COVID-19 and were placed in quarantine in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Navy guidance. The number of Sailors that were placed in quarantine amounts to less than one percent of the crew," Harrell said in an emailed statement. In a brief phone call, Harrell told Seapower that "there haven't been any changes to the numbers [of cases] from what was reported last week." Defense Department policy bars

disclosing exact numbers of COVID-19 cases on any ship or installation. Only cumulative numbers for each service are shared by the Pentagon.

The latest figures released by the Navy on Oct. 21 showed 11,508 uniformed personnel have tested positive for the novel coronavirus COVID-19. Of that number, 10,503 have recovered. Only 10 cases currently require hospitalization, and one Sailor has died since the pandemic began last winter. That is in comparison to more than eight million cumulative cases for the United States and over 200,000 deaths. Unlike many civilian leaders, Navy and Pentagon officials leaders have instituted strict requirements to halt the spread of COVID-19, including frequent testing, mandatory face coverings where social distancing is not possible and quarantining crews before they go to sea or report to new posts.

The Roosevelt became a flashpoint in the early days of the pandemic when scores of crew members became infected beginning in late March, 15 days after the carrier made a port visit to Da Nang, Vietnam. Stopping at Guam for a scheduled visit on March 27, the ship's commander Capt. Brett Crozier began disembarking crew as the number of Sailors testing positive for the virus continued to rise, eventually topping 1,000 cases. Finding suitable accommodations for thousands of crewmembers was a slow process, prompting Crozier to write a March 30 letter to top Navy officers pleading for faster intervention from his superiors

Crozier was relieved of command April 2 by then-acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly after his letter was leaked to the San Francisco Chronicle, sparking an outcry and worldwide media attention over the captain's actions and the fate of the carrier's crew. Modly resigned days later after his handling of the crisis, including Crozier's firing, touched of a political firestorm. A Navy investigation later upheld Crozier's removal.