

Sailors on Pacific Fleet Destroyer Test Positive for COVID-19

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Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Priscilla Jean-Francois checks the temperature of a Greek pilot, as a COVID-19 mitigation, as the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) arrives in Souda Bay, Greece, Nov. 8, 2020. The temperature checks are part of the COVID-19 protection effort. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Will Hardy ARLINGTON, Va. – Despite mitigating actions that have prevented any widespread outbreaks since March, the novel coronavirus COVID-19, continues to vex the U.S. sea services, with the destroyer USS Michael Murphy the latest vessel to report personnel testing positive for the disease.

Navy officials confirmed that an outbreak was reported on the Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyer in the Pacific Fleet Nov. 4. Under Defense Department policy, officials do not reveal specific COVID-19 numbers on individual ships or bases. However, no Sailors from the Michael Murphy were admitted to the hospital, according to a Navy spokesperson.

“Personnel who tested positive for COVID-19 were placed in isolation. Out of an abundance of caution, all close contacts and non-essential crew members are undergoing a two-week self-isolation period in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines,” Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman, a spokesperson for Naval Surface Forces Pacific, said in a statement to *Seapower* Nov. 20.

She said most of the crew that had been in self isolation “will be coming out over the weekend and will be back to work next week.”

The ship, currently in its basic phase training cycle, was cleaned in accordance with strict protocols, Schwegman said. She declined to discuss future operations of the ship due to operational security requirements.

The test positive cases on the Michael Murphy were the latest small outbreak on Navy vessels, most of them dockside, including the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, where "a small number of Sailors" tested positive for the novel coronavirus in October. None of those outbreaks have come close to the ordeal of the Roosevelt, the first U.S. warship to battle a COVID-19 outbreak at sea in March. The carrier was sidelined in Guam for months as scores of Sailors became ill and more than a thousand tested positive. The ensuing controversy over how the incident was handled cost the ship's captain and the acting Secretary of the Navy their jobs.

The latest figures released by the Navy on Nov. 18 showed 14,947 uniformed personnel have tested positive for COVID-19. Of that number, 12,715 have recovered. Only 11 cases currently require hospitalization, and only Sailor, from the Roosevelt, has died since the pandemic began last winter.

A multidisciplinary team of U.S. Navy Medicine personnel published a comprehensive analysis of the Roosevelt's COVID-19 outbreak in the New England Journal of Medicine on Nov. 11. The paper provided an epidemiological description of the outbreak that includes all 4,779 crew members.

Over the course of the outbreak, 1,271 sailors (27% of the crew) tested positive for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). More than 1,000 infections were identified within five weeks after the first laboratory-confirmed infection. An additional 60 crew members had suspected Covid-19.

The paper's authors found that COVID spread quickly among the predominately young crew (mean age 27). Transmission was

facilitated by close-quarters conditions and by asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic infected crew members. Nearly half of those who tested positive for the virus never had symptoms. Additionally, a history of using a medication to control high blood pressure (an angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor), respiratory disease and obese body mass index were associated with an increased risk of infection, according to the paper.