

More COVID-19 Infections Pop on Okinawa, on Another Carrier, Within President's Helicopter Squadron



Masked Sailors heave a line on Aug. 1 aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Rafael Peralta during a replenishment-at-sea with the fleet replenishment oiler USNS Pecos. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jason Isaacs

ARLINGTON, Va. – Another person has tested positive for COVID-19 at a U.S. Marine Corps installation on Okinawa, bringing to 16 the number of new cases since Aug. 1 at two installations on the Japanese island with novel coronavirus clusters, according to Marine officials.

The latest case was previously identified as a close contact of another person who tested positive within the cluster at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

“This individual has been in quarantine for over a week and was identified as a result of our policy to test all individuals prior to release from [restriction of movement] or due to close contact with a known positive,” Marine Corps Installations Pacific (MCIPAC) said in an Aug. 3 statement.

MCIPAC also reported that 33 people have recovered from infection since Aug. 1. The Marines have not specified which among the more than 200 cases diagnosed on Okinawa are military, family members or civilian employees.

On Aug. 2, the Marines announced that 15 individuals tested positive for COVID-19 in the previous 24 hours. All 15 have been in quarantine for more than a week and were identified

due to the Marines' policy to test all individuals prior to release from ROM status, MCIPAC said in a statement. Thirteen of those cases were from Camp Hansen, the hardest hit Okinawa facility, and two were from MCAS Futenma, which has the next highest number among the four Marine facilities on the island.



Sailors aboard the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Essex are tested for COVID-19 on July 27 while the amphib is homeported in San Diego. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Catie Coyle

"We are cautiously optimistic that we have curbed the spread among the two clusters that we identified at the beginning of July at MCAS Futenma and Camp Hansen. Those clusters were largely contained in a few units that arrived from the U.S. in mid-June," an MCIPAC spokesperson, Maj. Kenneth Kunze, said via e-mail to Seapower. Kunze added that the Corps also is monitoring COVID-19 in the Okinawa community and maintaining elevated measures to prevent spread outside the two clusters.

Meanwhile, more COVID-19 cases continue to pop up across the sea services. After months as the armed service with the most cases, the U.S. Navy, with 6,888 cumulative cases, has been surpassed by the Army, which has 9,697. The Marines reported 3,445. Under Pentagon policy, numbers of infected in individual units, facilities or geographic areas are not made public.

However, a spokesperson for Naval Air Force Atlantic did confirm that "a small number of Sailors" assigned to the aircraft carrier USS George H. W. Bush were diagnosed with COVID-19 in late July.

"The crew members who tested positive remain in isolation at their private residences in Virginia and receive daily medical supportive care until they have recovered," Cmdr. Jennifer Cragg said in a statement e-mailed to Seapower. "There has been no impact to readiness."

Norfolk Naval Shipyard, where the George H.W. Bush is in dry dock, is conducting temperature checks and is screening all personnel with a symptom questionnaire, and if required, referring Sailors with symptoms for medical evaluation, Cragg added.

Also, a Marine assigned to Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1), which flies the helicopters that transport the president, tested positive for COVID-19 on July 23. The infected Marine was asymptomatic and close contact tracing is being performed in coordination with the White House Medical Unit, Maj. Joseph Butterfield, a Marine Corps spokesperson, said in a statement.

The infected HMX-1 Marine, who is in isolation and recovering, was never in direct contact with the president's helicopter. Other Marines who may have had contact with the infected individual were removed from the squadron but have not tested positive.