



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
2000 NAVY PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON DC 20350-2000

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5800  
Ser 100002  
19 Jun 20

FINAL ENDORSEMENT

**The month of the date is spelled; however, it is shortened, which can still be miscommunicated by international audiences.**

From: Chief of Naval Operations  
To: File

Subj: COMMAND INVESTIGATION CONCERNING CHAIN OF COMMAND ACTIONS WITH REGARD TO COVID-19 ONBOARD USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71)

Ref: (a) ADM R. Burke, USN ltr 5800 Ser N09D/20U100825 of 27 May 20 (w/encl)

I reviewed reference (a), the Command Investigation, and I approve the report except as noted herein.

**Preliminary Statement**

**This memo contains the common entries for: TO, FROM, SUBJECT, and DATE, as well as a REF, for, "in reference to."**

**The purpose of the memo is stated immediately in the opening statement.**

After my review of reference (a) and the enclosures and references that inform it, I have determined that reassigning CAPT Crozier as the Commanding Officer (CO) of the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) is not in the best interest of Navy.

**The first paragraph indicates there are enclosures attached to the end of the memo for further reference.**

I make this decision fully recognizing that his email, which was leaked to the media and is the genesis of this investigation, was sent with the well-being of the crew of the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) as his top concern. Also, I am mindful that the actions of those involved must be considered with the understanding of the unprecedented nature of the challenge, the fast-pace of the crisis, and the difficulties involved with evolving guidance.

**What does the style and language used in second paragraph suggest about the tone of the writer?**

It is clear to me following this investigation, CAPT Crozier did not act according to the standards I expect of our commanding officers—to adapt in the face of adversity, exercise ingenuity and creativity in crisis, demonstrate resilience, communicate effectively up the chain of command, and to take bold and appropriate action early and often. His actions and inactions in the timeframe before sending the email fell well short of what I expect from our officers in command.

With this backdrop in mind, there are three fundamental principles that I considered as I made this decision: the nature of command at sea, the fundamental importance of the chain of command, and standards of performance in command.

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**Because this memo exceeds one page, it contains headings to help readers understand the topics discussed.**

Command at Sea

Title 10 of the U.S. Code requires that all commanding officers “take all necessary and proper measures “... to promote and safeguard the morale, the physical well-being, and the general welfare of the officers and enlisted persons under their command or charge.” The U.S. Navy Regulations further emphasize this principle by noting in Section 0802: “The responsibility of the commanding officer for his or her command is absolute .... The authority of the commanding officer is commensurate with his or her responsibility ... [and delegation of authority from him] shall in no way relieve the commanding officer of continued responsibility for the safety, well-being, and efficiency of the entire command.” This Navy Regulation goes on to state: “The commanding officer ... shall exercise leadership through personal example, moral responsibility and judicious attention to the welfare of persons under their control or supervision. Such leadership shall be exercised in order to achieve a positive, dominant influence on the performance of persons in the Department of the Navy.” These laws and regulations underlie the nature and responsibility of command at sea, without which our Navy could not perform its critical functions. CAPT Crozier’s letter and email were one means of exercising his responsibility as a commanding officer.

I believe CAPT Crozier had two critical obligations. First was to take every appropriate action possible—as quickly as possible—to safeguard the well-being of his crew in order to ensure maximum operational readiness of the THEODORE ROOSEVELT, and second, to forcefully and fearlessly communicate his observations, concerns, and recommendations up the chain of command. CAPT Crozier desired to ensure the welfare of his crew, and to accomplish this end, desired to get as much of the crew off the ship and into spaces that would allow for maximum separation. In so doing, he believed that he could ensure a “clean ship” that was ready to set sail if and when ordered to do so.

I am certain that CAPT Crozier had the best interest of the crew and the readiness of the ship he commanded in mind. However, he did not have the luxury of the best possible circumstances or time in which to meet those obligations. As explained in more detail below, CAPT Crozier did not forcefully and expeditiously execute the best *possible and available* plan, or do enough, soon enough. When faced with barriers to his primary course of action (COA), CAPT Crozier waited for others to act rather than doing what we expect of our commanding officers—to take immediate and appropriate action and to drive outcomes.

Chain of Command

**One idea is discussed per paragraph. This helps reader comprehension.**

A second bedrock principle essential to the function of the US Navy is the primacy of the chain of command. Those superior to the CO have the responsibility to clearly communicate decisions and orders down the chain of command and to consider the feedback from subordinates while the CO has the responsibility and authority to plan, decide, act and communicate up the chain of command. I expect commanding officers to fearlessly communicate up the chain of command and to have their facts straight when doing so. In the matter at hand, CAPT Crozier

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failed to effectively communicate his concerns up the chain of command, at key moments, despite numerous opportunities to do so.

The email and the letter CAPT Crozier sent was not delivered outside the chain of command and was not intended by him to be released to the media. However, CAPT Crozier did not ensure he had all of the relevant facts and did not use available avenues to inform his chain of command prior to his sending of the letter. Specifically, he failed to pre-brief his immediate superior, Commander, Carrier Strike Group NINE (CCSG-9), who was co-located on the ship, and he excluded Commander, U.S. SEVENTH Fleet (C7F) as an addressee on his email. Importantly, his email and letter were sent hours after a decision had been made by the Government of Guam to open hotels for CAPT Crozier's crew. His email neither accelerated that decision nor had any positive impact on the outcome.

#### Performance in Command

CAPT Crozier's performance during this unprecedented crisis fell short in several key ways. Specifically, during the ship's transit to Guam CAPT Crozier took some steps to slow the spread of COVID-19 throughout the ship, but he did not ensure physical distancing was implemented onboard. While this is challenging on an aircraft carrier, it remained an essential preventative measure to mitigate widespread transmission.

During the critical initial 72 hour period THEODORE ROOSEVELT was inport Guam before sending his email, he did not plan for and egress sailors off the ship and onto the base fast enough. If there were obstacles to expeditious egress, he did not aggressively seek solutions. Instead, he was improperly focused on the ideal COA (hotels) and not the most likely COA (on base facilities). He narrowly focused on what he considered to be obstacles outside of his control rather than "owning the plan" by quickly and effectively implementing available options within his span of control. As well, he failed to openly communicate his concerns to senior leaders regarding the need for additional support. For instance, he did not take advantage of available opportunities to brief the entire chain of command during daily VTCs. I also hold CCSG-9 accountable for the lack of an egress plan and more rapid egress off the ship.

He also exercised questionable judgment when he released Sailors from aft quarantine onboard the ship. This allowed for increased spread of the virus onboard the ship. He placed comfort of the crew ahead of safety of the crew at a time when he should have been focused on doing everything he could to slow transmission of COVID-19 by moving Sailors ashore.

Additionally, the COA to debark the crew and place them into Guam hotels was his most desirable COA, but also the most constrained. Supporting commanders, particularly Commander Joint Region Marianas, were in direct contact with the Government of Guam on the hotels option. CAPT Crozier should have been more focused on the planning and execution of the COA to egress sailors to the facilities available on Naval Base Guam. That COA was the best path available to immediately segregate, quarantine, and isolate his crew and thus meet his first

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critical obligation—to safeguard the well-being of his crew in order to ensure maximum operational readiness of the THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Finally, he did not ensure he had a full understanding of the facts before sending the email or include key members of his chain of command in the email chain. The letter did not have a positive effect on the plan in place and indeed placed undue pressure on the Governor of Guam at the time she was finalizing plans to open hotels.

## **Opinions**

I endorse the Opinions found in reference (a) as follows:

### Da Nang Port Visit (Opinion 1)

I concur that the decision to execute the Da Nang, Vietnam port visit was appropriate for the reasons stated in the report. While it is likely that COVID-19 was introduced to the THEODORE ROOSEVELT as a result of this port visit, the decision-making prior to and during the visit was reasonable based on the rationale for the visit and the information known at the time.

### Decisions During Transit to Guam (Opinion 2)

The THEODORE ROOSEVELT leadership decisions during the transit were generally sound but lacked effective implementation. I note that decisions were made during a time when our knowledge of COVID-19 and its method of spread was limited and dynamic. CAPT Crozier, did, for example, enforce cleaning of ship twice daily and reminded the crew daily of the necessity to do so. Daily screening for COVID-19 symptoms were also conducted; numbers of patrons in the ships' store were limited; additional precautions were taken with respect to food preparation and meal service. The one controlling action that fell short was effective social distancing. CAPT Crozier and the rest of the leadership team directed the crew to practice social distancing, but the report reveals compliance was inconsistent. I fully recognize that *effective* social distancing is not easily accomplished at sea, though the THEODORE ROOSEVELT leadership should have worked aggressively to enforce it.

### Egress of the Crew in Guam (Opinions 4 – 9)

The CSG-9 and THEODORE ROOSEVELT leadership did not do enough to effectively plan for and execute a rapid egress of the crew in Guam consistent with the constraints and restraints present at the time. I concur with the report's conclusion that more effective planning for COAs short of off-base, fully CDC-compliant single occupancy rooms should have occurred. Specifically, CAPT Crozier and CCSG-9 should have both pushed for the most effective COA of CDC-compliant rooms, *while at the same time* doing everything possible to egress the crew onto Naval Base Guam.

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However, the slow egress of the crew after arrival in Guam was influenced by numerous contributing factors. I believe each was within CAPT Crozier's span of influence to either resolve himself or seek support from his chain of command. This includes initial confusion over testing requirements prior to egress; perceived versus actual quality of berthing accommodations on Naval Base Guam; and planning requirements for the Okinawa contingency COA.

As the CO of THEODORE ROOSEVELT, CAPT Crozier should have forcefully owned the plan to quickly egress the crew given the applicable constraints and restraints, should have vigorously communicated his concerns about obstacles and resource constraints, should have insisted upon more information about ongoing efforts to secure hotel rooms, and should have pursued the interim solution of on-base berthing for his crew. However, make no mistake, the shortfalls in execution of the egress are not borne by CAPT Crozier alone. CCSG-9 as well as his staff also bear responsibility for the slow egress from the ship onto NBG.

#### Decision to Release Crew Members from Quarantine (Opinion 3)

The decision to release crew members from their quarantine location in the aft portion of the ship was inappropriate. I understand CAPT Crozier's conclusion that the onboard quarantine area was crowded, uncomfortable, and may have been leading to a higher rate of infection within that area of the ship. I also understand his conclusion that numerous new positive cases onboard the ship outside of the quarantine area may have suggested that the quarantine was ineffective. CAPT Crozier's stated intent in releasing Sailors from aft quarantine was to allow for greater social distancing onboard the ship. However, he should have continued to contain the spread of the virus through quarantine while simultaneously doing everything possible to move the crew ashore. His determination that onboard quarantine was ineffective should have led to an acceleration of Sailors to ashore accommodations. It did not.

#### CAPT Crozier's Email and Letter (Opinions 10, 12 – 15)

In sending the letter, CAPT Crozier's intentions were sound and I concur with the report's conclusion that he sent the letter as a "genuine plea for help." However, I also concur that the letter was unnecessary, had no positive impact on actions already underway, and should have been preceded by a clear and fulsome discussion with CAPT Crozier's immediate superior in the chain, the Commander of Carrier Strike Group NINE. While I do not believe he intended the letter to leak to the press, CAPT Crozier did intentionally omit the Commander of U.S. SEVENTH Fleet from the email. These were significant errors in judgment. Poor communication on the part of the C7F staff was a significant contributing factor in the overall poor communication throughout this chain of events. However, this does not warrant going around a member of the chain of command.

Forthright, fearless, and clear communication up and down the chain of command is essential to effective military operations, particularly when faced with a dynamic and novel threat such as COVID-19. The breakdown in communication and trust revealed in the report is troubling and certainly hampered the response to the COVID-19 outbreak.



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In the end, the email and letter sent by CAPT Crozier were unnecessary. Although it advocated for the best COA and the one that was eventually executed, actions were already underway to acquire CDC-compliant, off-base individual hotel rooms for the crew. Before sending a direct communication three echelons up the chain of command, it is imperative that all facts are known and all other means of communication within the chain have been thoroughly exhausted. In this, CAPT Crozier fell short.

#### Medical Department Letter (Opinion 11)

I concur that the letter signed by certain members of the THEODORE ROOSEVELT medical department was ill-conceived and inappropriate. While I do not question the desire for the medical department members to advocate for the health of the crew, it was exceedingly poor judgment to include in the letter a threat to release the letter to the public. The Senior Medical Officer (SMO) did indeed miss a leadership opportunity by signing the letter as written, even if he did not have an actual intent to release the letter. Similarly, CAPT Crozier missed a leadership opportunity when he, rather than issuing a direct order to not release the letter to the public, simply encouraged the SMO to not release it. The release of the letter, 24 hours after CAPT Crozier sent his email, was unnecessary.

#### **Recommendations**

(1) CAPT Brett Crozier. I concur that CAPT Brett Crozier will not be reassigned as the Commanding Officer of USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) or to a future command, either at sea or ashore. Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMPACFLT) may consider and impose administrative measures as appropriate, based on reference (a) and based on my conclusions in this memo. CAPT Crozier's deep experience and strong history of performance should be positively considered in future assignments to key Navy positions.

(2) Administrative Measures. The promotion of RDML Baker is held in abeyance pending a separate review. Any decision to recommend the detachment for cause of the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) assigned to THEODORE ROOSEVELT will rest with COMPACFLT and the operational chain of command. Additionally, COMPACFLT may consider and impose administrative measures on other personnel involved in this chain of events *if warranted*, including leaders not specifically listed in Recommendation 2.

(3) OPNAV Study. I concur that a study of coastal state transparency as it relates to COVID-19 is useful and will help inform future port visits. I direct the Director of Navy Staff to task this project to the appropriate OPNAV staff(s).

(4) Update of NTRP 4-02.10. I concur with the need to update relevant health guidelines as a result of what we have learned and continue to learn about COVID-19. The Surgeon General and the Naval Warfare Development Command are directed to collaborate and update NTRP 4-02.10.

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(5) Cultural Workshop for THEODORE ROOSEVELT. While I do not concur that the report established a systemic or widespread lack of integrity, I do concur that operational and administrative hazards result from a breakdown in communication. COMPACFLT may consider use of a Cultural Workshop to help the THEODORE ROOSEVELT CSG identify the root causes of the communications barriers involved in this case, and develop a learning culture that prevents similar events in the future.

(6) THEODORE ROOSEVELT Medical Department Debrief. I direct the Surgeon General or his designee to debrief the THEODORE ROOSEVELT Medical Department to determine and publish best practices with regard to at-sea COVID-19 prevention, mitigation, and response.

(7) THEODORE ROOSEVELT as Case Study. I direct the Vice Chief of Naval Operations to use this chain of events, the report, and my endorsement as a case study to identify, analyze, and publish lessons learned regarding the importance of clear, forthright, appropriate communication during crisis action planning and crisis response. This study and its use must provide principles or guidelines on when and how a leader might choose to bypass a member of the chain of command.

(8) CSG Commander Training. I concur with the recommendation as written and direct Director, Navy Staff to coordinate responsive action.

(9) CSG Training and Certification Events. I concur with the recommendation as written and direct Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command and COMPACFLT to coordinate responsive action.

  
M. M. GILDAY

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