

USS WILLIAM M. WOOD (DD/DDR-715)

Gearing Class Destroyer - A Written History

Displacement 2,425 tons, length 390'6", beam 40'10"; draft 18'6"; speed 34.6kts. William M. Wood (DD-715) was laid down 2 November 1944 at Newark, N.J., by the Federal Shipbuilding & Drydock Co., launched on 29 July 1945; named for William M. Wood, who served as Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery 1869-71. Admiral Wood had been present at the capture of the forts at Hatteras Island in 1861, the battle of the Monitor and Merrimac and the capture of Sewall's Point in Norfolk in 1861. Sponsored by Mrs. Joseph P. Tracy, and commissioned at the New York Naval Shipyard on 24 November 1945, CDR George R. Wilson in command.

Following shakedown training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and training in the Norfolk area, Wood operated in the Caribbean Sea from April to June 1946. In June, she was reassigned to the Pacific Fleet in San Diego. In July she departed, bound for Hawaii. The ship operated out of Pearl Harbor mid-July to late September, when she received orders to duty along the coast of China, operating out of Tsingtao, patrolling the Yellow Sea between northern China and Korea in an effort to stem postwar smuggling. That task lasted until February 1947, when she returned to San Diego in early March.

During the following six months, Wood conducted type training along the Pacific coast and underwent a three-month overhaul. In October 1947, she screened Valley Forge (CV45), on an extended voyage to the western Pacific. In the ensuing seven months, the ships called at Sydney, Australia; Hong Kong; Shanghai and Tsingtao in China, and Yokosuka, Japan. She returned to San Diego with the unit in May 1948 and resumed normal training and upkeep operations, which were interrupted once by a two-month overhaul at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard.

On 1 April 1949, a new fleet reorganization reassigned Wood to the Atlantic Fleet. The ship however, remained on the west coast until October, when she sailed for her new home port, Newport, R.I. She reported for duty with the Destroyer Force, Atlantic Fleet (DesLant) on 21 October. The ship served DesLant as a school ship, training junior officers in gunnery and engineering. During the following months, she conducted training out of Newport. July brought a brief tour of duty in Caribbean waters with a hunter/killer group and a quick visit to Iceland.

The Wood returned to Newport in August, but sailed the next month for the first of many deployments with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. After two months of duty however, the Wood left the 6th Fleet to resume operations out of U.S. ports. Following a brief leave and upkeep period at Newport, she proceeded south to Pensacola, Fla., where she served for a time as plane guard for USS Monterey (CVL-26) during carrier qualifications.

At the conclusion of that assignment, she returned to Newport. In January 1952, she embarked upon her second Mediterranean cruise. That tour of duty lasted seven months, during which time she participated in several NATO multinational exercises. It also included visits to ports in the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany. She returned to Newport in July and, after a voyage to Halifax in company with Midway (CVB-41) late in September, entered the Boston

Naval Shipyard for conversion to a radar picket destroyer. She was placed out of commission on 2 October 1952 and re-designated DDR-715.

Wood completed her conversion to a radar picket destroyer during the summer of 1953 and was re-commissioned on 6 June 1953, Comdr. J. S. Slaughter in command. Following a shakedown cruise to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, that fall, she began her third tour of duty with the 6th Fleet in November and returned to Norfolk in early February 1954.

The following month, Wood returned to Pensacola, Fla., where she once again planeguarded for the Monterey during carrier qualifications. The summer of 1954 brought the ship a two-month midshipman cruise to European waters, where she made port calls at Cadiz, Spain, and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. She returned to Norfolk in August and spent the remainder of 1954 engaged in training operations. In January of 1955, she embarked upon her fourth deployment to the Mediterranean. Again, NATO exercises and port visits at various points along the Mediterranean littoral kept the ship busy. She was in port at Volos, Greece, between 19 and 21 April, during which time the city suffered a series of severe earthquakes. She remained there after the disaster and rendered humanitarian aid to the victims.

Returning to the United States that summer, she entered the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for a major overhaul. That fall, the warship conducted refresher training and then returned to Norfolk to prepare for her upcoming Mediterranean deployment. That tour of duty began in February 1956 and ended in June. Between June and October, she operated out of Norfolk, along the coasts of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida conducting air defense exercises. Mounting tensions in the Middle East precipitated an Israeli invasion of the Egyptian Sinai on 29 October, and William M. Wood hastened to the eastern Mediterranean in November to join Task Force (TF) 26 in helping to restore peace and order in that chronically troubled sector of the world. The crisis cooled quickly, enabling the ship to return home in time to celebrate the Christmas holidays.

The Wood began 1957 with Operation "Springboard," conducted in the West Indies in January and February. In March, she escorted Canberra (CA-70), when the cruiser carried President Eisenhower to Bermuda to confer with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Wood provided transportation for the members of the press corps who covered the President's visit. In June, she entered the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for a three-month overhaul, followed by local training.

She then conducted refresher training out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for six weeks. In November, the ship resumed routine duty out of Norfolk with the Atlantic Fleet. She began 1958 the same way she began 1957, with "Springboard" exercises in the Caribbean during January and February. And in June, at the conclusion of three months of normal Atlantic Fleet duty, the ship embarked upon another Mediterranean deployment with the Sixth Fleet.

Not long after her arrival in the Mediterranean, fighting erupted in Lebanon. The intensification of the strife prompted the pro-western Lebanese President Chamoun to seek military help from the United States. President Eisenhower responded immediately by sending Marine Corps units

ashore in the troubled country and stationing 6th Fleet ships offshore to support them. During the period 14 July and 3 September, Wood spent 40 days on station, patrolling off the Lebanese coast. Following brief visits to Izmir, Turkey; Naples, Italy; and Gibraltar, she headed back to Norfolk and arrived there on 30 September. Normal Atlantic Fleet operations, including exercises along the coast and in the Caribbean followed.

Over the next few years, Wood continued to alternate 6th Fleet deployments with duty along the Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean area. In August 1962, she returned to the United States from her 10th Mediterranean assignment and resumed operations out of Norfolk.

Her schedule, however, was interrupted in October when President John F. Kennedy declared the "quarantine" of Cuba in response to the setting of offensive nuclear missiles on the island. For 57 days, Wood participated in the quasi-blockade patrols conducted around Cuba to prevent the importation of further missiles and to ensure the removal of those already there.

At the successful conclusion of that mission, the ship resumed normal east coast operations. In February 1963, members of Venezuela's communist insurgent group, the FALN, hijacked the Venezuelan freighter SS Anzoategui, and Wood joined ships from several navies in an international search for the merchant ship. Their efforts proved to be in vain, for the terrorists eluded capture, entered the Brazilian port of Belem, and received political asylum.

Following her return from her 11th Mediterranean deployment in the spring of 1964, Wood entered the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on 18 May 1964, to begin a Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization (FRAM) overhaul. During that period, she was converted from a radar picket destroyer back to an all purpose destroyer. She was re-designated DD-715 on 1 July 1964, and completed her FRAM conversion on 11 March 1965, when she headed back to Norfolk to rejoin the Atlantic Fleet.

In the midst of her post-overhaul refresher training, a revolution broke out in the Dominican Republic on 21 April. On the 29th, the ship received orders interrupting her refresher training, and she hurried to the scene of the conflict to protect foreign nationals caught in the middle and to support an American, and later multinational expeditionary, force dispatched to the island by the Organization of American States. The situation was soon stabilized, and Wood began a coastal patrol and surveillance assignment. While so engaged, she picked up 13 refugees, including some American citizens, who requested evacuation. These people were transferred to Pawcatuck (AO-108) on 7 May; and, the following day, O'Hare (DD-889) relieved her on station off the Dominican Republic. Wood then resumed refresher training and completed it on 20 May.

On 18 June, after post-refresher availability at Norfolk, the ship departed for another tour of duty in the Mediterranean with the 6th Fleet and continued alternating such deployments with normal duty out of Norfolk with the Atlantic Fleet. During 1968, she operated with the antisubmarine warfare (ASW) forces attached to the Atlantic Fleet. In May and June of 1968 she participated in the unsuccessful search for the nuclear attack submarine Scorpion (SSN-589), reported missing on 27 May. She closed the year in overhaul at Norfolk.

During her last eight years of active service, William M. Wood made two more Mediterranean cruises and then served there on a three-year extended deployment. During the first of her last two normal Mediterranean deployments, which lasted from 12 November 1969 to 22 May 1970, she shadowed two new Soviet helo carriers, Moskva and Leningrad, to gather intelligence on the new hermaphrodite cruisers/ASW carriers. The second of the two cruises lasted from 8 February to 23 July 1971 and also included routine 6th Fleet operations, mostly training exercises, both multinational and unilateral.

Following almost 13 months of 2d Fleet operations during late 1971 and early 1972, the ship embarked upon an extended assignment to the 6th Fleet on 18 August. Her homeport was officially changed to Athens Greece, from which port she operated for almost three years. The ship spent most of her time during that period engaged in training operations with other units of the 6th Fleet and with elements of Allied navies. She also made several forays into the Black Sea for special operations there. In July and August of 1974, she conducted continuous patrols in the vicinity of Crete during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

Her extended deployment with the 6th Fleet ended in June of 1975, when she began a long voyage home. The ship visited ports in France, Germany, Denmark, England, and Bermuda, before arriving back in Norfolk on 23 July. After six months of normal operations out of Norfolk, Wood deployed to the Mediterranean one final time in January of 1976. She returned to the United States that summer and resumed 2d Fleet operations. On 1 December 1976, she was placed out of commission at Norfolk, and her name was struck from the Navy list that same day. She was stripped of all usable parts and equipment in March of 1983 at Norfolk.

USS WILLIAM M. WOOD (DD715) was ultimately disposed of as a target ship for air and surface Harpoon missiles. On May 15, 1983 she was sunk off the coast of Puerto Rico in Operation ReadEX 1-83, as part of an artificial reef project. In spite of numerous prior training and inspection reports on damage control to the contrary, it took three direct missile hits to take the Wood down! Efforts are underway to search records to determine the exact POSIT (latitude and longitude), of her final resting place.

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