

## ***William Wood III Project Response Letter***

**02 Jan 2005**

P. O. Wheeler  
Captain, U. S. Navy  
Director of Naval History (Acting)  
Department of the Navy  
Office of the Chief of Naval Operations  
2000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350-2000

Dear Captain Wheeler:

Thank you for your letter of 27 Dec 04 regarding naming a new Navy destroyer in honor of Dr. William Maxwell Wood, the first Surgeon General of the US Navy. I understand that Senator Levin asked that you respond directly to me.

And thank you for your kind words of recognition toward Dr. Wood, the USS William M. Wood Association, and the crews of the DD-317 and DD-715, the destroyers previously named after Dr. Wood. They are most appreciated.

While I acknowledge your comment that the number of deserving candidates for ship naming far outnumbers the ships in the current building program, I also have noted the recent trend of the Navy to name many of the current DDG's after namesakes of previous Navy ships. Of the last 18 DDG's named (88-105), 12 of them, including the last 10, have been named for individuals who have had previous Navy ships named for them. And a number of those names represent the 3rd, 4th, and even 5th ships named for the same individual. Furthermore, a number of the predecessor ships had been decommissioned as recently as only 10 years ago. In light of this trend, I feel that our request to name a new Navy destroyer the USS William M. Wood is fitting and reasonable. As you have noted, the last ship to bear Dr. Wood's name, the DD-715, was decommissioned over 28 years ago, on 1 Dec 1976.

As you know, Dr. Wood had a long and distinguished Navy career, 43 years plus another two in retirement directing hospitals for BUMED. While he was not an officer of the line, and therefore was unfortunately under-recognized during his career, his was a commanding presence wherever he served, and his accomplishments far exceeded the normal duties of a Navy Surgeon, particularly his dangerous journey through Mexico gathering and communicating vital military intelligence to Commodore Sloat and to the Secretary of the Navy during the outbreak of war with Mexico. In addition, Dr. Wood was always a vigilant champion of the Navy Medical Corps, working tirelessly to increase the recognition of Surgeons and Corpsmen to improve the quality of the Navy's medical capabilities, which was finally accomplished after the Civil War during President Grant's tenure in office. Dr. Wood was also an advocate for the average sailor of the day, striving for progress in the recognition, living and working conditions, and treatment of ordinary sailors. In short, Dr. Wood's watch was outstanding and is deserving of continued recognition by the Navy. Dr. Wood's dedication and outstanding performance clearly raised the bar regarding performance and recognition for medical and other staff officers of the Navy.

While many of the recent DDG's that have been named include re-namings of previous Navy destroyers, most are of the DLG and DDG/CG classes that were in service during the 70's to mid 90's, and none have been re-namings of the many Sumner and Gearing class destroyers that served as the mainstays of the US Navy destroyer force throughout the post WWII and Cold War eras. The USS William M. Wood (DD-715) represents one of the last of the Gearings to be decommissioned after serving our country well for over 31 years. Her service started in post war patrols in the Pacific and Yellow Sea until she was soon transferred to the Atlantic Fleet as US military attention shifted from Japan and Germany to the growing threat presented by an aggressive and expansive Soviet Union. She made 19 Mediterranean cruises including an extended 3-year deployment, homeported in Greece. There, she safeguarded our carriers,

confronted the growing menace of the Soviet Navy, and conducted special operations gathering vital intelligence while steaming outgunned in the midst of the latest and most powerful ships of the Soviet Navy. She asserted US Naval presence by acting as the flagship of destroyer squadrons entering the Black Sea, cruising close to the Soviet coast, as well as by patrolling international hotspots when tensions flared including the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Lebanon Crisis, and the Dominican crisis. She was selected to accompany the Canberra with President Eisenhower aboard, and rendered international aid during the catastrophe in Volos Greece. The service of the USS William M. Wood was exemplary during this time of international tension with the Soviet Union, deserving continued recognition not only for her own service, but as a notable representative of the entire force of Sumners and Gearings that served our country well during the Cold War era.

The USS William M. Wood Association was founded approximately 10 years ago by CDR Charles Traub III, USN, retired. CDR Traub was CO of the USS William M. Wood (DD-715) during 1970-71 while the Wood was primarily conducting special ops shadowing the Soviet fleet in the Med. He has pretty much single handedly built the Wood Association into one of the largest and most active US Navy veteran's destroyer associations in existence today. He has located over 1,500 former shipmates and has provided the leadership to develop the association to what it is today. We recently held our 8th annual reunion in Jacksonville Florida, with 86 shipmates and about 140 total attendance. Our next reunion is in Chicago in 2005 and we expect to attract many Midwest US shipmates who have not been able to attend a reunion to date. We have held our reunions in Norfolk, Va Beach, Washington DC, Myrtle Beach, Boston, Philadelphia, and Jacksonville, and are scheduled to be in Charleston SC in 2006. Our reunions attract public attention wherever we go, and are uniformly admired by people we meet in our host communities. Though most of us are in our 50's to 80's, we continue to show the flag and our ship's photos, hull number, banner, hats, and silhouette. Our reunions generally include activities that are Navy related, including ship, naval base, and museum visits, and we always have a color guard and conduct a memorial service for shipmates who have made their final cruise. Our reunion in Chicago will be highlighted by a visit to the US Naval Recruit Training Center in Great Lakes, Ill. By moving our reunions from city to city we have been able to allow a large number of our located shipmates to attend one or more reunions, and as a result have one of the highest percentages of active participation by shipmates of any of our peer associations. Through this association I have had the honor of meeting many shipmates from all eras on the Wood, from 1945 plank owners to 1976 decomm crew, and I have to say, that each of them to a man is proud to be a citizen of the US, a veteran of the US Navy, and former crew member of the USS William M. Wood. Our reunions, along with being social events, are also a testament to all three of the above. We have formally discussed the possibility of a new Navy destroyer being named the USS William M. Wood at our annual business meeting, and have voted overwhelmingly that we would consider it an honor to see another ship named the USS William M. Wood during our lifetimes.

Our Association has made contact with a number of descendents of Dr. Wood, and we are happy that they have joined in support of our efforts to name a new Navy destroyer the USS William M. Wood. They share our enthusiasm for this honor. Our Association and Dr. Wood's descendents would be honored to attend the christening of the next USS William M Wood. We understand that the authorized Arleigh Burke DDG's have only been named through DDG-105. We are hopeful of having one of the remaining unnamed Arleighs in the shipbuilding pipeline named for Dr. Wood. We understand that the DDX series destroyers will not begin to come into service until the end of the decade, so strongly prefer that one of the new Arleigh Burkes be named after Dr. Wood rather than waiting for a DDX series destroyer.

In closing, I am hopeful that I have "made the case" for the Navy naming a new destroyer the USS William M. Wood, and that you would concur with our recommendation and champion our request in your annual submission of suggested names to the CNO and SECNAV. I would be more than pleased to discuss any of the above with you further at your convenience, and can arrange for discussions with CDR Traub and other trustees and officers of our association if you would like.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

James M Thomas  
Former RM2 – 1969-72  
USS William M Wood Association

CC: The Honorable Senator Carl Levin  
Captain Kevin M. Wensing  
The Honorable Gordon R. England  
ADM Vern Clark