

WOOD, WILLIAM MAXWELL  
Surgeon-General, United States Navy.

Born: Baltimore, Md., May 27, 1809.

Father: John Wood, Esq., was a native of England, descended from an ancient and respectable family of Devonshire, and came to this country at an early age. He resided at first in Philadelphia, and afterwards in Baltimore, where he became extensively engaged in mercantile pursuits, and took an active part in the defense of Baltimore against the British fleet in the War of 1812. Dr. Wood's mother, Charlotte Abbott, was the daughter of David Abbott, and grand-daughter of Benjamin Abbott, a noted Methodist divine. (See History of Methodism.)

William Maxwell Wood was the eldest of eight children, and got his earlier education at the Bel Air Academy, in Harford County, Md. He left school upon the death of his father, being then fifteen years of age, and, his father's estate proving to be inadequate to the support of his mother and brothers and sisters, got employment in a mercantile firm for the next three years. During this time he may be said to have educated himself, studying the classics, of which he continued always to be remarkably fond, at night schools, and laying the foundation for the acquaintance with the French and Spanish tongues in which he was notably proficient in later life.

He entered the Medical Department of the University of Maryland in 1827, under the guidance of Dr. Joshua Cohen, of Baltimore, his preceptor. Before his graduation he determined to apply for admission into the Medical Corps of the Navy, and made the journey from Baltimore to Washington on foot, getting permission from the Department to appear before the Medical Board then in session at Philadelphia, on the day after his arrival in Washington. He passed the Board successfully, taking rank as number three of his date, and shortly afterward took his degree of M.D. at Baltimore in 1829.

His first orders were to the Navy Yard, Pensacola, May 16, 1829, and his naval service may be summarized as follows: To the Grampus, May, 1831; leave of absence, September 6, 1833; to the North Carolina, February 19, 1836, to November 21, 1836; Independence, January 25, 1837, to March 7, 1838; commissioned as Surgeon from February 20, 1838; Poinsett, April 16, 1839, serving in the Seminole War; November 17, 1840, granted leave of absence; Columbia, November 30, 1841, to January 18, 1842; Naval Rendezvous, Baltimore, July 28, 1842, to April 27, 1843, when he was ordered to the Levant; appointed Fleet Surgeon, Pacific Squadron. At the expiration of this term of service, Dr. Wood returned to the United States across Mexico, as bearer of confidential dispatches, and, at the imminent risk of his life, sent back to Commodore Sloat the information of the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Mexico which justified that officer in hastening to Monterey with his fleet, and securing the State of California to the United States. There is no reasonable doubt that, but for Dr. Wood's courage, which his acquaintance with the Spanish language enabled him to learn at this time, negotiations already far advanced would have resulted in the transfer of the State of California to Great Britain.

January 17, 1846, he was placed on waiting orders; ordered to Baltimore, January 27, 1846; to the Michigan, January 1, 1848; January 26 to August 7, 1850, waiting orders; August 7, 1850, to the Michigan again; October 30, 1851, waiting orders; November 29, 1852, member of Medical Board of Examiners; Naval Station, Sackett's Harbor, N.Y., 1853-55; Fleet Surgeon, East India Squadron, 1856-58. During this term of service he took part in the