

Navy's Expeditionary Warfare Capacity Abroad Expands With ESB's Deployment



USS Hershel "Woody" Williams departs Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, for deployment. Williams is conducting its inaugural deployment following its commissioning in March. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Joshua D. Sheppard
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's overseas expeditionary warfare capacity has expanded significantly with the deployment of the second expeditionary base ship USS Hershel "Woody" Williams.

The ship is forward-deploying to the U.S. Naval Forces Africa area of operations. The Williams likely will give the Navy a more enduring presence in waters off Africa.

The Navy's first ESB, USS Lewis B. Puller, is forward-deployed to the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command area of operations. Both ships operate with two crews, Blue and Gold, which rotate with each other in a manner like the Navy's four Ohio-class guided-missile submarines. Both ESBs operate with a mixed crew of Sailors and civil mariners of the Military Sealift Command.

The Hershel "Woody" Williams, with its Blue Crew on board, departed Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, on July 27, the U.S. 2nd Fleet public affairs said in a release.

In recent years, the Navy occasionally has deployed expeditionary fast transport ships, destroyers, and amphibious warfare ships to waters off West Africa for theater security cooperation missions.

"As the commanding officer of the "Woody" Williams' Blue Crew, I can tell you that we are excited to embark on the ship's

first deployment,” Capt. David Gray, commanding officer of the Blue Crew, said in the release. “For the majority of our Sailors, this will be their first deployment, and I can’t think of a more exciting area to operate in. We look forward to our deployment in U.S. Naval Forces Africa.”

The 784-foot-long Hershel “Woody” Williams “features a 52,000 square-foot flight deck, fuel and equipment storage, magazines, repair and mission-planning spaces,” the release said. “Its features include a four-spot flight deck, a mission deck and hangar, work and living spaces for a couple hundred staff and embarked personnel.”

The ship can embark rotary-wing aircraft, mine-countermeasures unmanned surface vessels, unmanned underwater vehicles, patrol craft, SEAL teams and other special operations forces. It has command, control, and communications capabilities for its embarked forces. The ESB is named for Hershel “Woody” Williams, a Marine Corps veteran, awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism during the Battle of Iwo Jima in World War II.