

News and stories

Navy ship christened after West Virginia native, WWII hero

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Paul Hess | WVVA.com

Medal of Honor recipient "Woody" Williams was on hand in San Diego to christen a Navy ship named in his honor.

USNS Hershel "Woody" Williams, a 784-foot ship, can hold 250 personnel and has a 52,000 square-foot flight deck. It's the Navy's second EBS or Expeditionary Sea Base. Construction started October 2015. The ship will go into service early next year. It will support MH-53 and MH-60 helicopters with an option to support MV-22 tilt-rotor aircraft.

The 94-year-old Fairmont, West Virginia native was visibly emotional during the christening ceremony on Saturday.

"I want you to imagine in your mind that you are the person standing where I am standing," said Williams. "It is very difficult to understand why things happen in our life as they do. In April 1945, a Marine captain took a little, short, lead pencil and began writing on a piece of paper...laboriously. And he wrote some of the details of a day in combat on that little island of Iwo Jima. He could not have known at that time the impact he was going to have on the life of the individual he was writing about. That individual, a country boy from the hills of West Virginia, who really never wanted to be in war. He'd been taught during his youth and growing-up time, you did not take lives. I assumed he was trained the same way that this country boy was. But when he wrote those words, a recommendation to have that individual receive our nation's highest award the grateful nation can bestow, he didn't know whether his recommendation would be approved or not. But as a result of his efforts, we are here today. We are celebrating a miracle. A miracle as a result of his pencil-written words. Captain Donald Beck must also be this day celebrating in Heaven for his labor of love. He is here in spirit. But he is represented by one of his own, his son Barry Beck. This is a moment in history that is far beyond my ability to really comprehend what has happened. Many of us have experienced miracles in our lives. Some are very life-changing, as experienced by many members of the armed forces."

Williams is the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient from the famous Battle of Iwo Jima in World War II.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin also spoke at the event.

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