

Surgeon helps medical mission aboard <i>Africa Mercy</i>Mercy

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Eleven years ago Tulane surgeon Dr. Peter Meade volunteered with Doctors Without Borders in Sierra Leone. This summer he returned to the West African country, one of the continent's poorest, for a two-week stint performing operations aboard the hospital ship *Africa Mercy*.



The world's largest charity hospital ship, the *Africa Mercy* has six operating rooms and a 78-bed hospital. (Photo from Mercy Ships)

The *Africa Mercy* is the world's largest charity hospital ship. The 499 foot-long vessel, with six operating rooms and a 78-bed hospital for post-operative recovery, is owned and operated by [Mercy Ships](http://MercyShips.org), a faith-based medical mission organization headquartered in Texas.

"I heard about this for many years and I've always wanted to go. Within the last year I decided to pursue it," says [Meade](#), an assistant professor of clinical surgery. "The ship serves people at ports along the coast of West Africa where they determine the need is great."

Screenings are held at which crowds of people stand in line for hours to see a Mercy Ships doctor. Once approved, they are given a date to return to the ship for surgery. The need is always greater than the capacity the ship has for treatment.

"I dealt with things that general surgeons are well versed in dealing with. Basically I did a lot of hernias and hydroceles," Meade says. "I did 32 cases during my eight operating room days, about four a day. There is a tremendous backlog of people who need these procedures."

During Meade's tour the volunteers who staffed the ship were from 36 different countries. Specialists included ophthalmologists, maxillofacial surgeons, orthopedic surgeons and anesthesiologists. Physicians, however, make up only a small part of this floating village. There are also nurses, physical therapists, cooks, engineers and writers on board.

Through the cooperation of the entire Mercy Ship's crew ? medical and non-medical ? lives are transformed every single day. "Mercy Ships is very well organized," says Meade, "and we all worked as a team ? nobody functions by themselves."