

Two NASA astronauts stuck in space have flown long missions before

September 7 2024, by Marcia Dunn



NASA astronauts Suni Williams, left, and Butch Wilmore stand together for a photo enroute to the launch pad at Space Launch Complex 41 Wednesday, June 5, 2024, in Cape Canaveral, Fla., for their liftoff on the Boeing Starliner capsule to the international space station. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara, File

The [two NASA astronauts](#) left behind at the International Space Station

following [the return of Boeing's troubled capsule](#) are Navy test pilots who have ridden out long missions before.

Astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams are now full-time station crew members along with the seven others on board.

NASA decided last month they won't be flying back in their [Boeing Starliner capsule](#), but will wait for a ride with SpaceX in late February, pushing their mission to more than eight months. Their original itinerary on the [test flight](#) was eight days.

On Friday, the empty Starliner capsule departed the space station and parachuted into the New Mexico desert.

Butch Wilmore

Wilmore, 61, grew up in Mount Juliet, Tennessee, playing football for his high school team and later Tennessee Technological University. He joined the Navy, becoming a test pilot and racking up more than 8,000 hours of flying time and 663 aircraft carrier landings. He flew combat missions during the first Gulf War in 1991 and was serving as a flight test instructor when NASA chose him as an astronaut in 2000.

Wilmore flew to the space station in 2009 as the pilot of shuttle Atlantis, delivering tons of replacement parts. Five years later, he moved into the orbiting lab for six months, launching on a Russian Soyuz from Kazakhstan and conducting four spacewalks.



NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore, background left, and Suni Williams, background right, pose for a photo with their families after leaving the operations and checkout building for a trip to launch pad at Space Launch Complex 41 Wednesday, June 5, 2024, in Cape Canaveral, Fla., before launching on the Boeing Starliner capsule for a trip to the international space station. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara, File

Married with two daughters, Wilmore serves as an elder at his Houston-area Baptist church. He's participated in prayer services with the congregation while in orbit.

His family is used to the uncertainty and stress of his profession. He met wife Deanna amid Navy deployments, and their daughters were born in Houston, astronauts' home base.

"This is all they know," Wilmore said before the flight.

Suni Williams

Williams, 58, is the first woman to serve as a [test pilot](#) for a new spacecraft. She grew up in Needham, Massachusetts, the youngest of three born to an Indian-born brain researcher and a Slovene American health care worker. She assumed she'd go into science like them and considered becoming a veterinarian. But she ended up at the Naval Academy, itching to fly, and served in a Navy helicopter squadron overseas during the military buildup for the Gulf War.



NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams are welcomed by the crew of the International Space Station upon their arrival using the Boeing Starliner spacecraft on Thursday, June 6, 2024. Credit: NASA via AP, File

NASA chose her as an astronaut in 1998. Because of her own diverse background, she jumped at the chance to go to Russia to help behind the scenes with the still new space station. In 2006, she flew up aboard shuttle Discovery for her own lengthy mission. She had to stay longer than planned—6 1/2 months—after her ride home, Atlantis, suffered hail damage at the Florida pad. She returned to the space station in 2012, this time serving as its commander.

She performed seven spacewalks during her two missions and even ran the Boston Marathon on a station treadmill and competed in a triathlon, substituting an exercise machine for the swimming event.

Husband Michael Williams, a retired U.S. marshal and former Naval aviator, is tending to their dogs back home in Houston. Her widowed mother is the one who frets.



In this photo provided by NASA, Boeing Crew Flight Test astronauts Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore, center, pose with Expedition 71 Flight Engineers Mike Barratt, left, and Tracy Dyson, aboard the International Space Station's Quest airlock on June 24, 2024. Credit: NASA via AP, File



In this photo provided by NASA, Boeing Crew Flight Test astronauts Butch Wilmore, left, and Suni Williams pose for a portrait inside the vestibule between the forward port on the International Space Station's Harmony module and Boeing's Starliner spacecraft on June 13, 2024. Credit: NASA via AP, File



In this photo provided by NASA, astronauts Butch Wilmore, left, and Suni Williams inspect safety hardware aboard the International Space Station on Aug. 9, 2024. Credit: NASA via AP

"I'm her baby daughter so I think she's always worried," Williams said before launching.

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