



Commander Christopher D. Stone, Churchill's new commanding officer

## Churchill Holds Change of Command Ceremony at Sea

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USS WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, At Sea (NNS) -- Guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) held a change of command ceremony at sea in the Gulf of Aden, Aug. 16.

Cmdr. Christopher D. Stone relieved Cmdr. Michael E. Hutchens as Churchill's commanding officer in a ceremony held on the destroyer's flight deck.

Hutchens assumed command of Churchill Feb. 26, 2011. He led the ship through a work-up period that included a visit from the Navy's Board of Inspection and Survey Feb. 11. The ship successfully passed INSURV with high scores in navigation and electrical safety. Under Hutchens, Churchill successfully completed a combined unit training exercise, where it expended over 7,000 rounds of ammunition and was certified in such areas as anti-submarine warfare and maritime interdiction operations.

Winston Churchill departed homeport in Norfolk, Va. June 20. Hutchens commanded the ship through the first phases of its current deployment, and oversaw the ship through exercises in the Mediterranean and its current mission in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations.

"It's been my great honor to lead you these last 18 months. You have my gratitude and my thanks for how hard you've worked and what you've accomplished," said Hutchens. "I look forward to hearing how you perform over the course of this deployment. Your accomplishments on this mission and beyond represent the legacy I wish to leave."

During the ceremony, Winston Churchill's Command Master Chief (SW/AW) Myla C. Presco presented Hutchens with the Meritorious Service Medal, awarded by Rear Adm. Manazir, commander, Carrier Strike Group 8, in recognition of his accomplishments while in command. Hutchens said he is looking forward to spending some time with his family before he takes his next assignment with Command, Carrier Strike Group 2.

Hutchens also received a plaque from the chief's mess signed by its members and a specialty gift from the crew, a shell casing from the ship's MK-45 5-inch/54-caliber lightweight gun, polished and engraved with the ship's seal and a personal message.

"It was an honor to serve under Cmdr. Hutchens, and an honor to let him know that we appreciate what he's done aboard," said Hull Technician 2nd Class Curtis L. Klein, one of the engravers of the casing.

Stone is taking command of a Navy vessel for the first time, though previously served as executive officer of USS Stout (DDG 55) from December 2007 through January 2010. There he completed the inaugural Navy Ballistic Missile Defense deployment in the European Command area of responsibility. Stone then reported to United States Joint Forces Command, Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (JECC) in February 2010 as a member of the Joint Deployable Team. While assigned there, he deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan to coordinate Rule of Law development efforts across 14 U.S. government and multinational agencies, and later served as the first JECC liaison officer to United States Transportation Command.

"I'm incredibly excited to command this superbly capable warship and I'm looking forward to leading the finest men and women in the United States Navy."

Stone said that his top priorities are combat readiness and investing in the future. He added that he wants to see his department heads on Churchill command their own ships one day and see his Sailors become chief petty officers. Stone emphasized that accomplishing those goals begins now.

"I am a strong believer in continuous improvement," he said. "In my short time aboard, I can sense teamwork and pride bristling throughout the crew and an eternal dedication to making Churchill a great ship. You can count on the fact that I will give you everything I have to do just that, and I count on your continued commitment to do the same."

Stone received his command-at-sea pin from Fire Controlman 1st Class (SW) Scott P. Odell, with whom he previously served on guided-missile cruiser USS Valley Forge (CG 50).

"When I met Cmdr. Stone, I was a third class and he was a lieutenant," said Odell. "It was a pleasure working for him then and we have both risen higher in the Navy since. I look forward to seeing the crew rise even higher now that he's assumed the leadership on the Churchill."

Churchill is deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility conducting maritime security operations, theater security cooperation efforts and support missions as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.