



USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81)  
Public Affairs Release

## Churchill Crosses Suez Canal into 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet

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RED SEA [July 18, 2012] –The guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) passed through the Suez Canal and into the U.S. Navy 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet area of operations (AOR) July 18<sup>th</sup>.

Churchill, a member of the Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group (CSG), trailed the guided-missile cruiser USS Hue City (CG 66) and the nuclear-powered carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69), along with the guided-missile frigate USS Klakring (FFG 42), the dry cargo/ammunition ship USNS Robert E. Peary and the fleet replenishment oiler USNS Big Horn (T-AO 198) through the 167-kilometer canal

The destroyer's position at the rear of the convoy of ships allows it to better defend against threats if they arise, according to Cmdr. Christine R. O'Connell, executive officer of Churchill. The small arms and air support capabilities of the destroyer make it more capable of responding quickly to threats in the narrower confines of the canal, said O'Connell, so response time is important.

"An approaching ship might be innocent in its intentions, but in case it's not, we must be able to respond immediately," said O'Connell.

The canal is one of the world's busiest and most congested areas for sea traffic, so security is a little more heightened than at a normal straits transit, according to Churchill's Weapons Officer, Lt. Matthew J. Dattoli. Along with constantly rotating watches at port and starboard weapons stations, the visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) team patrols the decks. "This is where prior planning and training becomes very important," said Dattoli. "What we do during our Composite Unit Training Exercise (COMPTUEX) allows people to react more attentively in the constantly changing environment and constant heat."

Cmdr. Michael E. Hutchens, who said he is proud of the "tremendous team effort" Churchill displayed to navigate the canal. He characterized the experience of passing the canal, where temperatures can rise to 110 degrees Fahrenheit, as "opening the door and feeling the heat of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet AOR upon you." "This ship's ready for what awaits us in 5<sup>th</sup> fleet," said Hutchens. He added that while the mission there is nebulous, Churchill will be ready to engage in maritime security and anti-piracy operations, along with any other mission that arises.

"We've trained a year for a mission that starts today at the end of the Suez Canal," said Hutchens.

The Suez Canal was completed in 1867 and runs from Port Said, Egypt, to Port Tawfiq in Suez, Egypt. The waterway connects Europe and Africa via by the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea.

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.