



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

Churchill Sailors Aid Orphanage

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DURRES, Albania [July 14, 2012] –Sailors from the guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) joined “Operation Big Bird” in Tirana, Albania July 13. The mission? To paint and renovate a children’s orphanage.

While Churchill is engaged in a port visit to the city of Durres, Albania, 20 of its Sailors took the 45-minute ride to the Albanian capital of Tirana to engage in a community relations (COMREL) project at the Bethany Christian Orphanage. “This is an opportunity for our Sailors to personally connect with the mission of improving relations overseas and to take on the higher calling of serving those in need,” said Lt. Cary C. Shinn, chaplain for Destroyer Squadron 28 and an organizer of the COMREL.

Churchill Sailors covered the orphanage’s infant quarters in a creamy shade of canary yellow paint using paint rollers, extended brushes and whatever tools were necessary to coat the two-story building. When not painting the facility, Churchill Sailors found other ways to beautify the property. “We pulled weeds, raked leaves, swept the grounds- anything to help this place,” said Operations Specialist 1st Class (SW) Nicole D. White, a COMREL participant.

“Because of Churchill’s contribution, visiting families looking to adopt will enter attractive, warm quarters, a better environment more conducive to adoption,” said Maj. Mark T. Berlenbach, U.S. Army bilateral affairs officer, assistant chief, office of defense cooperation Albania, United States Embassy. Berlenbach help coordinate COMREL projects in the area- and is responsible for naming this one “Big Bird.”

Bethany has made it a mission to change the function of orphanages in Albania from childhood-long care to encouraging adoption and foster care for the children as early as possible, said Agim Xhumari, the executive director of the facility. “The children in this facility are all three or younger now, as the rest have gone on to family care,” said Xhumari. “With the help of volunteers like the Churchill Sailors, I think we can send more children to loving homes.”

When the renovation work was complete, participants were able to meet some of the children and play with them on the renovated playground. That renovation came courtesy of another COMREL project by the amphibious dock-landing ship USS Gunston Hall (LSD 44), which came to Bethany Christian April 29 to build a drainage ditch and beautify the grounds. “It’s great to see Sailors meet these wonderful children on the very grounds previous Sailors helped clean and revamp,” said Berlenbach. “It shows what military members can do when they reach out to the community.” “These kids had so little, but they have a place that cares for them here, and we had a chance to make their lives a little better,” said COMREL participant Sonar Technician Surface Seaman Ian Appling. “I’m glad to meet them, and it’s great to show them that we care,”

Churchill is engaged in a regularly scheduled port visit in Durres, Albania, in order to enhance U.S-Albania relations and continue U.S. 6th Fleet efforts to build Global Maritime Partnerships with European nations and improve maritime safety and security.