

# Welcome Aboard...

**1797**  
Construction of USS *Constitution* is completed at Edmund Hartt's Shipyard in Boston. The frigate is launched as one of the first six ships of the new United States Navy.

**1803-1805**  
USS *Constitution* serves as flagship during the Barbary Wars, defending American shipping interests in the Mediterranean Sea.

**1812**  
In a short and fierce battle during the War of 1812, USS *Constitution* defeats the British frigate HMS *Guerrriere* and earns the famous nickname "Old Ironsides"

**1830**  
USS *Constitution* is rumored to be scrapped until Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem "Old Ironsides" sparks public outcry.

**1897**  
After spending nearly 40 years as a training ship USS *Constitution* is permanently returned to Charlestown Navy Yard.

**1931-1934**  
Restored, USS *Constitution* embarks on a three-year tour of America's East, Gulf and West Coasts.

**1997**  
Newly restored, the ship sails under its own sail power for the first time in 116 years to celebrate her bicentennial.

**USS *Constitution*, known affectionately as "Old Ironsides," is the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world.**



The ship's commanding officer maintained accommodations for business and comfort in the sizable captain's cabin.



The **helm** is the ship's primary steering mechanism. It is attached to the rudder through a series of ropes and pulleys.



At 210 ft., the **mainmast** is 13 feet shorter than the nearby Bunker Hill Monument and holds the main topsail, as large as a regulation basketball court.



The **Charlie Noble** is the smokestack for the cambouse, or galley stove, used to cook meals for almost 500 men on the gun deck below.

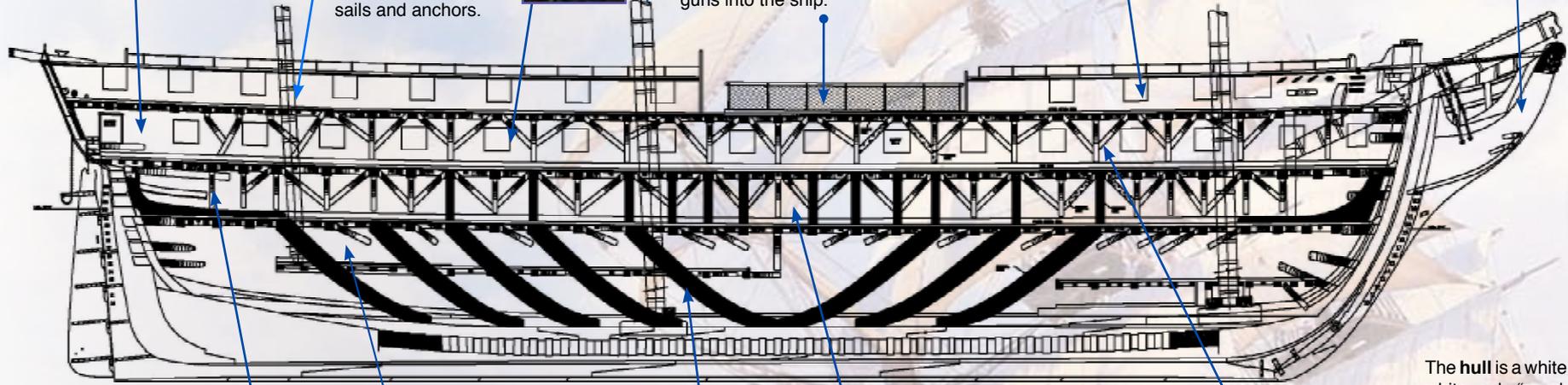


USS *Constitution* displayed several **figureheads** (with figure) and **billeheads** (without figure) in her time, including Hercules, President Andrew Jackson, and a dragon winding down her bow.

The **capstans**, which are located on the spar and gun decks, are used to maneuver heavy objects such as sails and anchors.



The **main hatch**, a large opening in the spar deck covered with wooden latticework, allowed supplies and long guns into the ship.



## Decks...

**SPAR**

**GUN**

**BERTH**

**ORLOP**

A thick hull incorporating Live Oak, a tree unique to the southern United States, contributed to "Old Ironsides" cumulative 33-0 engagement record. The sweat, dedication and sacrifice of her U.S. Navy crew virtually ensured it.



Crewed, maintained and operated by the U.S. Navy to this day, USS *Constitution* stands as an active reminder of America's maritime heritage, its struggle to preserve its freedom, and national pride.



The **wardroom** is where the ship's officers lived. The accommodations were less comfortable than the captain's, but considerably more so than the rest of the crew.



The ship's surgeon performed his work in the **surgeon's cockpit**, a cramped space where the tools, while the best available for the time, now appear harsh after 200 years of medical progress.



Most of the ship's 400 men slept in four-hour shifts in **hammocks** that packed the berth deck.



The **diagonal riders** were technological innovations incorporated into USS *Constitution's* design. Massive lengths of wood transfer the ship's weight evenly along the keel to prevent it from "hogging" (warping).

The **long guns** weighed about 6,000 pounds and could hurl a 24-pound solid iron shot across a 1,200 yard range. It took a team of 7-14 men to operate the unwieldy guns.



The **hull** is a white oak/live oak/white oak "sandwich" design that repelled or absorbed gun shot and earned the ship its famous nickname. At points, the hull is 24 inches thick.

Made of white oak, the **keel** is original to USS *Constitution*, being laid at the ship's construction. It acts as the "backbone" which supports the rest of the ship.

# Welcome to America's Ship of State!

# A History of the Ship...

After the Revolutionary War, new United States economy depended upon seaborne commerce with other nations. Merchants who traded in the Mediterranean found it increasingly difficult to conduct trade. American merchant ships, left vulnerable by the disbanding of the Continental Navy in 1785, were attacked by Barbary (North African) corsairs who captured the ships and enslaved American sailors.

Recognizing the threat to our economy and the lives of American citizens, President George Washington argued for a Navy. Congress responded on March 27, 1794 with the Naval Armament Act, authorizing six frigates to be built along the eastern seaboard.

*Constitution* was designed by Joshua Humphreys and Josiah Fox to be powerful enough to defeat any enemy within her class and fast enough to out sail a stronger opponent.

Built at Edmund Hartt's shipyard in Boston, the wood for her construction came from various places along the east coast, from Maine to Georgia. *Constitution*, the largest ship to be built in Boston up to that time, was launched October 21, 1797.

## -The Barbary War-

For centuries, the Barbary States of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli had levied tribute on even the most powerful European nations. If payment was refused, ships were captured and the crews sold into slavery. Before building our Navy, America paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in presents and tribute to Algeria, Tripoli, and Tunis. The Bashaw of Tripoli, however, enraged that other nations were receiving more tribute than he, cut down the flagpole at the American consulate on May 14, 1801, thus declaring war on the United States.

*Constitution* was Commodore Edward Preble's flagship in the Mediterranean in 1803. Upon arrival, American forces blockaded Tripoli Harbor and bombarded fortifications and armed Tripolitan boats.

On June 3, 1805, a peace treaty was drawn up in *Constitution's* cabin. Tribute to Tripoli ceased and the American captives were released.

## - War of 1812 -

In 1812, Great Britain had been for 19 years at war with France. The Royal Navy reigned supreme and needed ever increasing number of sailors. American merchant ships were seized to prevent trade with France and American crews were "impressed" into British service. Rallying to "Free Trade and Sailor's Rights," America declared war on Great Britain, June 18, 1812.

On August 19, southeast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a ship was sighted and *Constitution* made for her with all sails set. It proved to be HMS *Guerriere*, the British 38-gun frigate infamous for terrorizing American ships. When *Constitution* was still far astern, *Guerriere* began firing. *Constitution* bore down upon the enemy in silence. The gun crews stood patiently at their quarters awaiting the order to fire. Cannon shot from *Guerriere's* smaller 18-pound guns continued to impact but did remarkably little damage to *Constitution's* solid oak hull and an unknown Sailor shouted, "Huzzah! Her sides are made of iron!" Thus *Constitution* gained the renowned title of "Old Ironsides."

The inspired crew was ready to take the fight to *Guerriere*, but not until the ships were nearly abreast did Captain Isaac Hull give the word, "Now, boys, pour into her!" A whole broadside struck *Guerriere* and for 15 minutes the ships exchanged fire before her aft mast fell. *Constitution* passed ahead and sent a raking broadside crashing down the entire length of the enemy's decks, which cut away much of the rigging.

*Guerriere's* fore and main masts fell, and, helpless, Captain James Dacres surrendered his ship. The British lost 78 killed and wounded while the Americans suffered only seven dead and seven wounded in a battle that lasted approximately 35 minutes, one of the shortest in history.

It was a dramatic victory for America and for *Constitution*. In half an hour, the United States "rose to the rank of a first-class power" and the country was fired with fresh confidence and courage in the unpopular War of 1812.

On February 20, 1815, *Constitution* had her last great fight. Two British warships the frigate HMS *Cyane* and the sloop-of-war HMS *Levant* were spotted off the island of Madeira. Although individually each was smaller and lighter than *Constitution*, their

combined batteries were heavier. Captain Charles Stewart's skillful maneuvering prevented them from regrouping and overpowering him. Nearly five hours later, *Cyane* and *Levant* had surrendered.

## -In Transition-

In 1830, it was rumored that *Constitution* was to be condemned and scrapped. A poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., entitled "Old Ironsides", aroused popular feeling amongst Bostonians; eventually Congress appropriated money for restoration in 1833.

From 1835-55, *Constitution* made numerous voyages, including her 1844-46 cruise around the world under Captain John Percival, when she covered 52,370 miles in more than 500 days at sea. From 1853-55, "Old Ironsides" patrolled the west coast of Africa searching for illegal slave traders.

During the American Civil War, "Old Ironsides" was used as a U.S. Naval Academy training ship. In 1878 she went on her last trip across the Atlantic, carrying American exhibits to the Universal Exposition at Paris, before returning to service in the Apprentice Training Squadron for newly enlisted men. Her

long career at sea closed in December, 1881 when she was decommissioned, stripped of her rigging, and, in 1882 converted to a Navy receiving ship - used for administrative purposes - in Portsmouth Navy Yard, Kittery, Maine.

## -Into the 20th Century -

In 1897, John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, a Massachusetts Congressman and grandfather of future president John F. Kennedy, drew public attention to "Old Ironsides," by spearheading action to bring *Constitution* back to Boston, for her centennial.

From 1927-31, "Old Ironsides" underwent a major restoration. Funds for the restoration were generously donated by the people of America, with some of it raised in a "pennies campaign" by school children across the nation. The remaining balance necessary was appropriated by Congress.

From 1931-34, *Constitution* toured the East, Gulf and West coasts, transiting the Panama Canal, as thanks to America. The voyage began in Boston on July 2 and covered more than 22,000 miles and 76 ports. "Old Ironsides" returned to the Boston Navy Yard on May 7, 1934, after hosting more than 4.6 million visitors.

On July 21, 1997, in celebration of the ship's 200th year, *Constitution* sailed for the first time in more than 116 years, thrilling millions of patriotic Americans and proving once again that she is truly America's Ship of State. The ship carries out her modern day mission as the Navy's ambassador to the public and is a representative of the thousands of Sailors and Marines that serve the United States proudly.

## The Ship at a Glance...

### War of 1812 Era

#### Armament

Rated 44 Guns, she carried:  
(24) 32-Pounder Carronades  
Crew: 4-8 / Range: ~400 yards

(30) 24-Pounder Long Guns  
Crew: 7-14 / Range: ~1200 yards

(1) 18-Pounder Bow Chaser

#### Ship's Stats

Speed: 13+ Knots (~15mph)  
Sail Area: 42,710 Square Ft.

#### Crew Composition

450-500, Including:  
55 Marines / 8-10 Ship's Boys  
30-40 Officers & Midshipmen

### USS Constitution Today

Foremast Height: 190' 11"  
Mainmast Height: 210"  
Mizzenmast Height: 175' 4"  
Displacement: 1,900+ tons  
Length: 207' (Billethead to Taffrail)

#### Crew Composition:

70 Active Duty U.S. Navy Sailors  
3 Officers, 4 Chiefs, 63 Crew

## Visiting Us...

USS *Constitution* is open for public visitation year-round and can be found via internet mapping sites at  
**Charlestown Navy Yard**  
**1 Constitution Rd.**  
**Charlestown, MA, 02129**

For directions, visitor hours, and more, visit our website at  
<http://history.navy.mil/ussconstitution>  
All visitors to the ship are required to go through a security screening process to ensure the safety of the ship, its guests and crew.

# America's Ship of State USS CONSTITUTION "Old Ironsides"



Charlestown Navy Yard  
Charlestown, Massachusetts  
[www.history.navy.mil/ussconstitution/index.html](http://www.history.navy.mil/ussconstitution/index.html)