

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **USS Constellation**

One of the most famous sailing ships in United States Naval history, the frigate Constellation, is being restored to her original design and permanently docked at Baltimore. Md., the city where she was built and launched and from which she sailed to accomplish her outstanding Naval service record.

Some of her original fittings, which were removed and stored for safekeeping, have been returned to the ship, decks have been resurfaced, officer and crew quarters refurbished, and all exterior areas have been given protective paint.

The Constellation, oldest ship of the United States Navy, was launched at the Baltimore shipyard of Samuel and Joseph Sterrett on Sept. 7, 1797. The present program commemorated her 160th year.

This first ship of the new nation's Navy started her trial run immediately after launching. With her country's flag of 15 stars and 15 stripes floating from her mizzen-gaff and her commissioning pennant flying from her maintop pole, the Constellation began one of the most important trips in naval history.

Commanding the first frigate to put to sea for the U. S. was fiery, sea veteran Thomas Truxton, who had distinguished himself in action against the British during the American Revolution. Out of his crew of Maryland country boys and merchants' sons he made excellent seamen.

It was during this first cruise that Truxton established necessary shipboard regulations, the four-hour watch system and the three degrees of court martials. His rules of 1789 still appear in the "Blue Jackets Manual" of today's U. S. Navy.

According to Truxton's papers and other records, the Constellation's first assignment was to rendezvous with the ship Baltimore and report to Havana, serving as escort to merchant ships coming to the United States and protecting them from French ships which were attacking merchantmen under any flag.

The Constellation, carrying 36 guns and 300 men, defeated the L'Insurgente, the newel French naval vessel carrying 45 guns and 415 men. The news of the victory kindled the pride of the Americans particularly in

Baltimore and when she arrived there with the prize, a great celebration took place. Another victory was over a second French frigate, La Vengeance the following February.

During the next 40 years, the "Yankee Racehorse," as the Constellation had become known, carried the United States flag into the oceans chasing and capturing pirates off the coast of Tripoli and defeating other ship aggressors against the U. S.

Before the War of 1812 broke out, she was taken to Washington Navy Yard for hull repairs and to have new 24-pounder cannon and 32-pounder carronade added.

The Constellation put to sea in 1813 but was imprisoned in Chesapeake Bay by the British blockade. She later saw action against pirates off North Africa.

Her naval duties were not completed, however, and in Nov. 1840, Commodore Kearney took her to the Far East to protect the interests of American citizens threatened by the war between China and Great Britain. There Chinese engineers, and architects marveled at the Constellation's design and made detailed drawings and replicas of the famous ship. The frigates visit also made possible the granting of commercial privileges to American and subsequent immigration of Chinese people to the United States.

During the Civil War she sailed the Mediterranean capturing blockade runners trading there. After the war was taken to Philadelphia as a training and receiving ship and later was stationed at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis as a training ship.

Still ready to serve when needed (?) the Constellation which sailed (?) in 1880 by carrying food to that starving land. In May 1894, she was moved to Newport, Rhode Island, there to serve many years as a training ship.

In 1941, the Constellation won her last big honor when, by Presidential proclamation she became Admiral Ernest J. King's flagship of the Atlantic fleet. In 1946. her admiral's flag was lowered, and she was towed to the Boston Navy Yard to remain until 1953 when she was ordered to be scrapped.

After much public protest in Baltimore, a Constellation Committee was formed and through its efforts a bill was taken to the House of Representatives and signed by President Eisenhower in 1955 resulting in the ship being towed to Baltimore and turned over to a committee so that restoration plans could be carried out.

The Constellation organization has begun an intensive effort to raise \$2 million estimated for completing the work according to the announcement coming from Baltimore.