



USS CONSTITUTION: Getting To Know “Old Ironsides”



The United States Navy’s oldest warship is the USS CONSTITUTION. She is a wooden-hulled, three-masted sailing frigate. She was designed by Joshua Humphreys and was one of the six original frigates of the U.S. Navy. President George Washington named all but one of these ships; the exception being USS CHESAPEAKE. USS CONSTITUTION was built in Boston, Massachusetts, and launched in 1797 under the command of her first captain, Samuel Nicholson. “USS” before her name indicates that she is a United States Ship.

The CONSTITUTION served in a brief ‘quasi-war’ with France from 1798 to 1800 before fighting in the First Barbary War against pirates from North Africa. She bombarded the port city of Tripoli during a naval blockade that prevented merchants from trading with the ruling sultan who protected pirate crews that sailed from there. In the War of 1812, CONSTITUTION fought and sank the British warship HMS GUERRIERE. During the battle, a few of the enemy’s cannonballs bounced harmlessly off of her hull, prompting one of her crew to proclaim “*Huzzah! Her sides are made of iron!*” Afterward, her nickname of “Old Ironsides” quickly became popular. One of her later captains, Daniel Patterson, first served aboard her during the First Barbary War. Patterson was captured and held as a Prisoner of War before being released. He commanded the naval station at New Orleans during the War of 1812.

Most wooden warships had an expected lifespan of ten to fifteen years. In 1830, a Boston newspaper mistakenly reported that the CONSTITUTION would be scrapped. Writer Oliver Wendell Holmes published the poem *Old Ironsides* in response and public outcry caused the Navy to save America’s most famous warship. She sailed once more to the Mediterranean Sea from 1848 to 1851. During this time, she was visited by Pope Pius IX and marked the first time

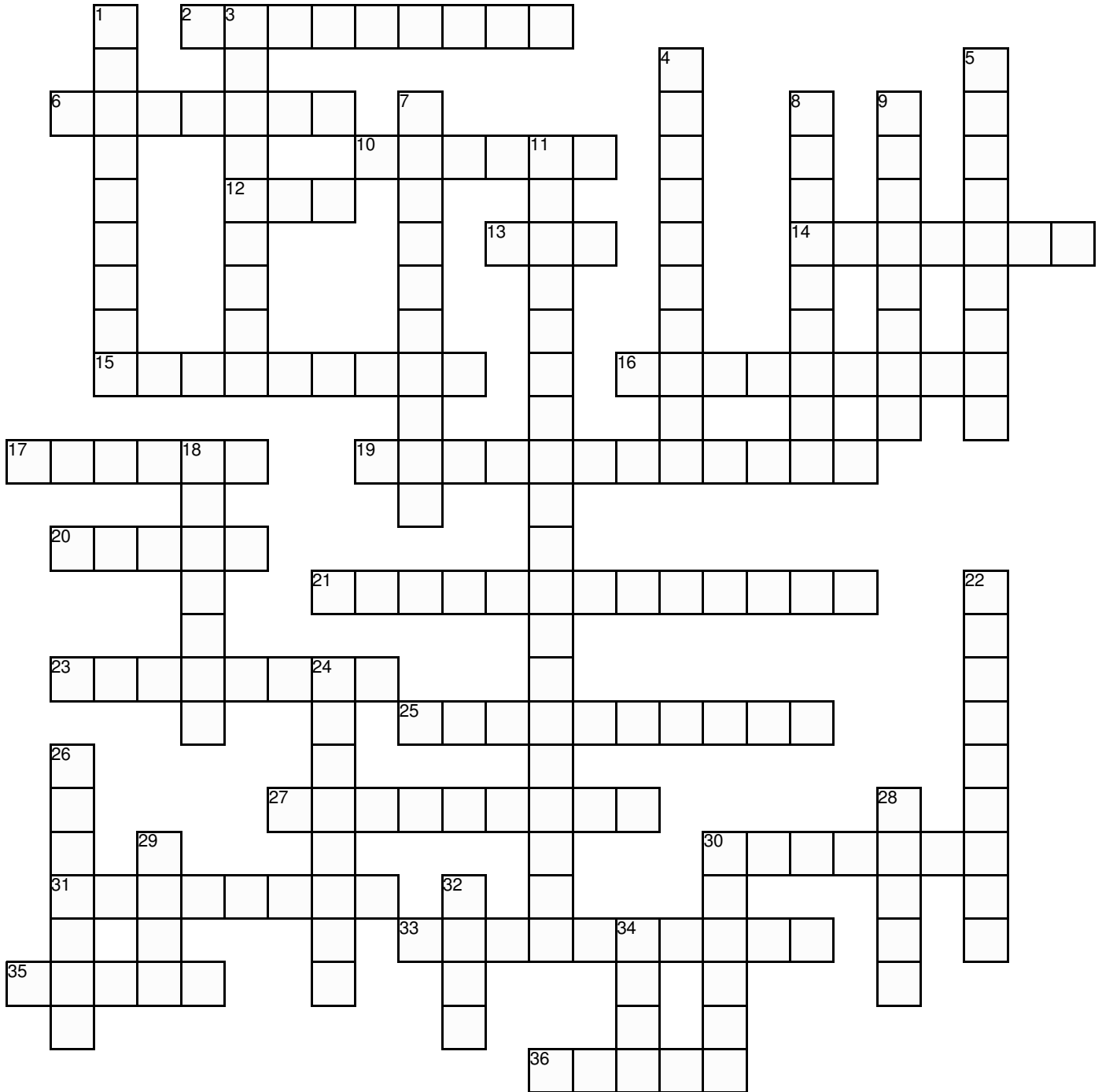
a pope had set foot on American territory. But her combat days were past her now. During the Civil War and in the years afterward, the old frigate served as a training ship for cadets at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. She visited the Paris World Fair of 1878 but soon fell into disrepair. By 1900, efforts were underway again to save her and she soon became a museum ship open for tours by the public. CONSTITUTION was restored in 1925 and began a good-will cruise around the United States in 1930. She stopped in ninety cities with her crew of sixty sailors, fifteen marines, and one mascot monkey named Rosalie. She returned to duties as a museum ship in Boston. In 1940 President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered that CONSTITUTION be placed permanently as a part of the active Navy fleet. She remains a part of the fleet to this day, still serving as a museum in Boston.

Sadly, CONSTITUTION's sister ships did not meet such pleasant fates. The UNITED STATES was seized by the Confederacy during the Civil War. She served in the Confederate Navy before being sunk to avoid capture. The CONSTELLATION fell into disrepair and was disassembled. However, some of her timbers were reused and built into a newer ship of the same name that now survives as a museum ship in Baltimore. The CHESAPEAKE and the PRESIDENT were both captured during the War of 1812 and taken into service by the British Royal Navy. The CONGRESS, like the CONSTELLATION, fell into disrepair and was scrapped.

CONSTITUTION is a frigate that carried forty-four guns. She is constructed from pine and oak timbers and her underwater hull is sheathed in copper plating. Over sixty acres of trees were used to build this mighty frigate. Revolutionary war hero Paul Revere forged the copper spikes used to hold her sheathing in place. She has a square-rigged sail plan (i.e. how her sails are arranged). CONSTITUTION has three masts (vertical poles) from which sails are hung from the yardarms (the horizontal poles attached to the masts). Each sail and each line (rope) aboard ship has a name and sailors must know all of these names and their locations. Standing rigging are ropes or cables that do not move; they provide support to the masts. Running rigging moves via pulleys and helps raise/lower sails or pivot the yardarms on the masts. The tallest mast is the main mast. The forward-most mast is the foremast. The rear-most (aft-most) mast is the mizzenmast. The lowest and largest square sail is the course sail and each course sail takes its name from the mast it is mounted to: foresail and mainsail. Square sails are always mounted facing side-to-side. Moving upward from the course sails, the sails are called the topsail, the topgallant (pronounced "ta-gallant"), and the royal. As with the course sail, each sail identifies with its mast (i.e. foresail, mizzen topsail, main topgallant, fore royal). Triangular sails mounted front-to-back (fore-to-aft) can also be found. The lowest triangular sail mounted fore-to-aft on the mizzenmast is called the spanker. All other sails above it on the mizzenmast are square sails and follow the previous naming pattern. The triangular sails that run between the foremast and the bowsprit (the pole that juts out off of the front of the ship) are called jibs. Triangular sails located between the three masts are called staysails.

Name: _____

Complete the crossword below



Across

2. CONSTITUTION's first captain: Samuel _____.
6. CONSTITUTION saw action at this North African city during the First Barbary War.
10. What city was CONSTITUTION built in?
12. CONSTITUTION was one of how many frigates built?
13. Triangular sails carried at the very front of the ship.
14. _____ rigging are the movable ropes (lines) used to manipulate CONSTITUTION's spars and sails.
15. President _____ ordered CONSTITUTION to be made a permanent part of the active Navy fleet in 1940.
16. Daniel _____ commanded the naval station at New Orleans during the Battle of Lake Borgne and the Battle of New Orleans in 1814-15. He later commanded CONSTITUTION from 1826-28.
17. The lowest and largest square sail on the CONSTITUTION: the _____ sail.
19. Which of CONSTITUTION's sisterships eventually served the Confederate States Navy briefly in 1861-62.
20. This is the highest square sail found on the CONSTITUTION's mast.
21. Timbers from this sistership of CONSTITUTION still exist in a newer museum ship bearing the same name in Baltimore Harbor today.
23. The name for CONSTITUTION's forward-most mast.
25. Which U.S. president named the CONSTITUTION?
27. During and after the Civil War, CONSTITUTION served as a cadet training ship at the Naval Academy in what city?
30. What type of warship was the USS CONSTITUTION?
31. Triangular sails located in between two masts.
33. One of CONSTITUTION's two sisterships that were captured by the Royal British Navy during the War of 1812.
35. How many acres of trees were used for CONSTITUTION's construction?
36. The mascot monkey that sailed aboard CONSTITUTION from 1931-34 during her 3-year tour of the United States.

Down

1. How many guns is CONSTITUTION designed to carry?
3. CONSTITUTION's nickname: 'Old _____'.
4. The name for CONSTITUTION's aft-most mast.
5. One of CONSTITUTION's two sisterships that were captured by the Royal British Navy during the War of 1812.
7. _____ is the third square sail upward from the main deck of the CONSTITUTION.
8. While fighting this British warship, CONSTITUTION earned her famous nickname.
9. The name for CONSTITUTION's tallest mast.
11. This author wrote a famous poem that rallied the public to save CONSTITUTION from scrapping.
18. A sail that runs front-to-back instead of side-to-side aboard CONSTITUTION and is located on the lower part of the aft-most mast.
22. This man designed CONSTITUTION and her sisterships: Joshua _____.
24. _____ rigging are the non-moving cables or ropes (lines) used to support CONSTITUTION's masts.
26. This sail is the second square sail upward from the main deck of the CONSTITUTION.
28. The horizontal poles mounted to the CONSTITUTION's masts from which the sails are hung.
29. A vertical wooden pole from which sails and lines can be hung.
30. CONSTITUTION served in a 'quasi-war' between the United States and this country.
32. USS = United States _____
34. In 1849, Pope _____ IX became the first Pope to ever set foot aboard an American vessel.