

...being a Navy man, I thought Dave would appreciate. It was a framed 2-page letter (and envelope) hand-written by my then 20-year old father to his own mother on September 3, 1945 while aboard the heavy cruiser USS QUINCY (CA71) anchored in Tokyo Bay at the conclusion of World War II. I propped the letter up on one of Dave's dining room chairs for him to view. He squatted down to get a better look and respectfully asked my permission to read the letter. Permission granted, he read the letter aloud, without pause, from beginning to end as if he had read it a hundred times before. As he concluded, he commented, "You can hear the relief in his voice – it's finally over." It was a profound pleasure to share that piece of family past with a man who undoubtedly has a feel for history, particularly of the seagoing variety. For the next couple of hours I sat mesmerized by Dave's easygoing nature and wonderful stories as I looked out his living room window toward Fort Sewall and the mouth of Marblehead harbor, both of which feature prominently in the history of CONSTITUTION.

A Brief History

After the Revolutionary War and the break with Britain, America's now unprotected merchant fleet was being harassed and crews enslaved by the "Barbary Pirates" based in the North African ports of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. Even the British began interdicting American merchant ships, particularly after the French, once allied with the colonies in the American Revolution, were drawn to matters at home and their own French Revolution. In response to the aggressions at sea, President George Washington signed the Act to Provide a Naval Armament in March of 1794 authorizing the construction of six well-armed frigates and the creation of the U.S. Navy. All six ships were designed by naval architect Joshua Humphreys, but each of the six was to be built in a different shipyard in a different city.

CONSTITUTION's white oak keel was laid that same year at Edmund Hartt's yard in Boston. Over the next three years at total cost of \$302,700, her live oak and red cedar frames and timbers joined her white oak planking with brass, bronze, and copper fasteners forged by silversmith, and famous patriot of the American Revolution, Paul Revere. Instead of the 18-inch thick sides typical for ships of that era, CONSTITUTION's sides were made 21 inches thick. Her 204-foot length displaced 2,200 tons, and her three masts – the tallest of which reaches 220 feet – would carry nearly 43,000 square feet of sail. After becoming stuck on the ways during two launch attempts in late September, 1797, CONSTITUTION was successfully launched on the third attempt on the high tides of October 21st. So began the fighting career of the oldest commissioned warship afloat, but nearly 15 years would pass before she received the nickname for which she became famous.

The War of 1812 erupted with England over – among other things – its practice of impressing American seamen into service aboard British fighting ships in their perpetual conflict with France. While claiming to be seizing only British deserters, many of those taken were known to be legitimate United States citizens. America had already fought for – and won – its freedom from Britain, and it was willing to fight again to preserve that freedom. So it was on August 19, 1812, that CONSTITUTION's Commander, Isaac Hull, ordered the pursuit of sails on the horizon some 600 miles east of Nova Scotia – sails that turned out to belong to Britain's 38-gun frigate HMS GUERRIERE. A fierce naval battle ensued, and CONSTITUTION poured into GUERRIERE with broadside cannon fire ultimately bringing down all three of GUERRIERE's masts. Cannon shot from GUERRIERE was actually seen to bounce off of CONSTITUTION's 21-inch sides, causing an unknown sailor to famously remark, "Huzza, her sides are made of iron." Totally disabled, GUERRIERE surrendered to CONSTITUTION, and the moniker "Old Ironsides" lives on to this day.

CONSTITUTION engaged in many more battles, including the fight with HMS JAVA in which CONSTITUTION's steering wheel was shot away only to be replaced with the stricken JAVA's wheel when the smoke of battle cleared. In April of 1814, CONSTITUTION was returning to Boston to repair a split mainmast when she found herself being pursued by HMS JUNON and HMS TENEDOS. Being damaged and plagued by lighter winds than her pursuers, CONSTITUTION's Commander, Charles Stewart, ordered drinking water, food, and, yes, 'spirits' to be thrown

overboard to lighten her load as she made way for Marblehead to the north of Boston. (It is even rumored that she offloaded cannon, but if my friend Ray Bates ⁽¹⁾ – local lobsterman, diver, author, historian, and all-around Renaissance man – has not found one then I don't believe they ever left CONSTITUTION's decks.) Sources say that CONSTITUTION carried Marbleheaders among her crew who knew the rocky coastline and shallows well enough to pilot her in to safety. Once CONSTITUTION fell under the protection of the guns of Fort Sewall at the mouth of Marblehead harbor, JUNON and TENEDOS called off their pursuit. This very same Fort Sewall is more of a park than a fort today, nearly 200 years later, and it makes for a beautiful view out Dave Cashman's window.

Dream Sheet

Before I headed over to meet Dave that December morning, I did a little homework. I knew that after being commissioned from the US Navy Officer Candidate School in 1964, Dave did multiple tours in Vietnam aboard destroyers, and later in his naval career he assumed the role of Executive Officer of the Aegis Training Center. The Aegis integrated combat system deployed on cruisers and destroyers is considered the most advanced surface ship weapons systems in use today. The question that I just had to ask Dave was obvious: How does a guy who has spent much of his career aboard modern warships and involved with the most high tech weapons systems end up commanding CONSTITUTION. Granted, CONSTITUTION was state of the art – but that was 200 years ago. There were actually two questions: one was "how" and the other was "why." The "why" question he answered by relaying two stories from his childhood.

Story #1: When Dave was a kid of about 10 or 11 growing up in Nahant, a peninsula town north of Boston, his Dad built him an 11' sailboat, which began his love of sailing. One summer morning, he announced to his mother that he was taking the boat out for a sail. His destination, which he had neglected to mention, was The Graves, rocky ledges several miles offshore atop which sits Graves Light. Later that afternoon after sailing for quite a while, Dave heard a voice coming from what he described as a gray-colored Navy boat.

"Hey, kid, you alright?" Dave responded that he was.

"Where're you goin'?" the voice asked.

"Graves," Dave replied.

"Where did you come from?" the voice asked next.

At that point, Dave turned to look back toward Nahant and realized that he wasn't quite sure where he had left it. Dave did have a compass on board but probably hadn't taken a reading on the way out; he was just heading for the light house clearly visible on the horizon. However, the return trip would be a little tougher; from a distance, Nahant no longer stood out from all the other towns that blended together to form the coastline.

The voice helped him out with a compass bearing to get him home. It was 7 or 8pm by the time Dave made it back, and his father was pacing the dock, naturally concerned for his son's wellbeing. "His face was as white as this," Dave said picking up a cloth napkin from his dining room table. "He said, 'put that boat on the mooring and get in here.'" His father took the boat away for a year, and it "just built my love for sailing even more."

Story #2: No too long after the sailboat incident, the Cashman family took a trip into Boston for a tour of the USS CONSTITUTION. The ship clearly had an impact on Dave, and he really never forgot about her. Whenever he was on leave from the navy visiting his family in Nahant, he always made a point of going to Boston to see CONSTITUTION. He knew some of the skippers – they had served together – but he was really visiting his ship; she just wasn't his yet! That brings us to "how" Dave Cashman assumed command of the oldest warship afloat.

Once Dave made commander, he had the opportunity to periodically fill out the navy's "dream sheet" indicating where he would most like to serve. Dave described the form as having four spaces in which to write your desired stations in order of preference. At every opportunity, Commander Cashman completed the form by writing in 1) USS CONSTITUTION, 2) USS CONSTITUTION, 3) USS CONSTITUTION,