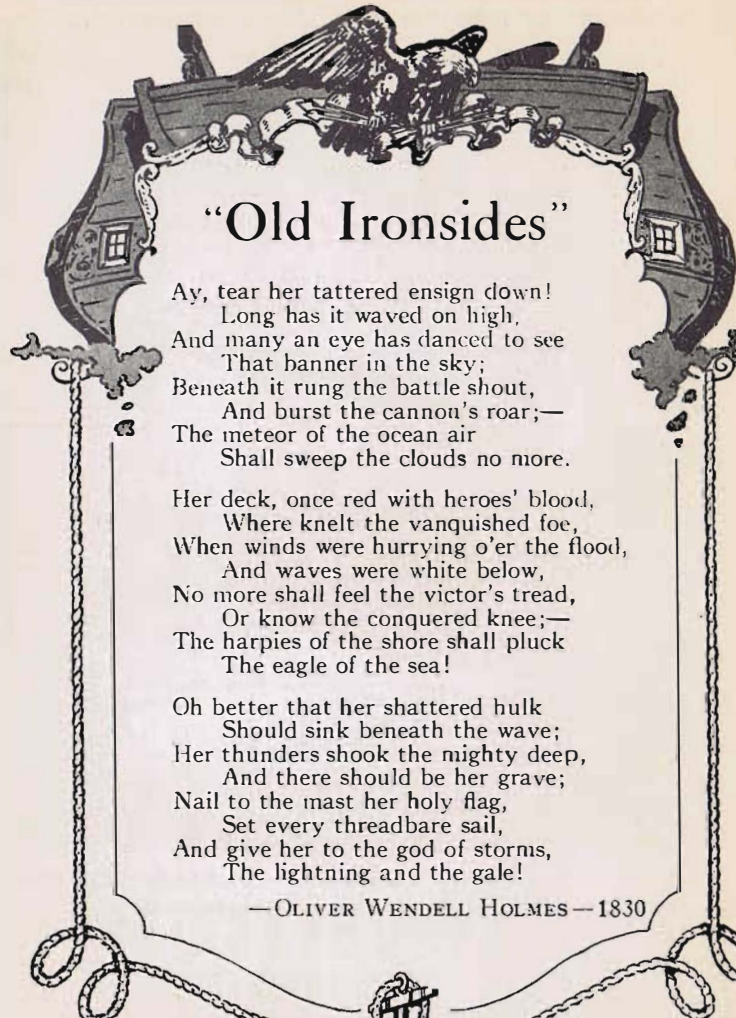


THE STORY OF THE U.S. FRIGATE
CONSTITUTION
(OLD IRONSIDES)





“Old Ironsides”

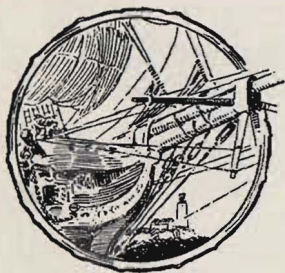
Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!
Long has it waved on high,
And many an eye has danced to see
That banner in the sky;
Beneath it rung the battle shout,
And burst the cannon's roar;—
The meteor of the ocean air
Shall sweep the clouds no more.

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,
Where knelt the vanquished foe,
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,
And waves were white below,
No more shall feel the victor's tread,
Or know the conquered knee;—
The harpies of the shore shall pluck
The eagle of the sea!

Oh better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the god of storms,
The lightning and the gale!

—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES—1830

The Story
of the
U.S. Frigate Constitution
(Old Ironsides)



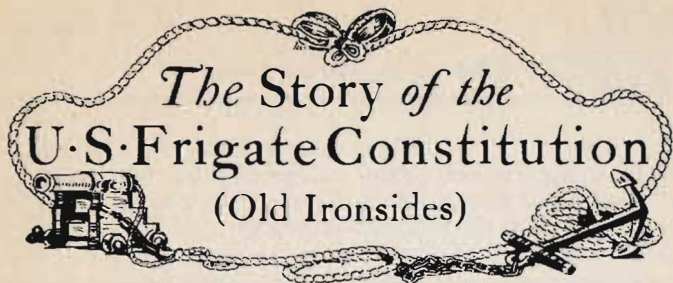
Published by

John Hancock
MUTUAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Daniel F. Lord



The Constitution
"kedged" away from the
British Fleet



The Story of the **U.S. Frigate Constitution** (Old Ironsides)

“The Eagle of the Sea”

ONCE again “Old Ironsides” has won a victory, and rebuilt and restored at the Boston Navy Yard, Charlestown, she carries on her proud traditions. No ship more justly deserves a place in the affections of a country than does the noble old frigate CONSTITUTION, whose “iron sides” shielded and protected our young and struggling nation at one of the most critical periods in our history.

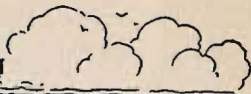
She has never known defeat, although she bears the scars of many battles. In 1798, the CONSTITUTION helped to clear the West Indies and our coast line of French privateers. In 1803–1805, she bombarded the forts at Tripoli and dictated peace without tribute to the Barbary States. In the War of 1812, “Old Ironsides” won a succession of famous victories over the British fleet, increasing our prestige abroad and inspiring at home a greater faith in the new Republic.

Launched in 1797, the CONSTITUTION sailed victoriously through eighty-four years of active service, and since 1881 has been preserved most fittingly, not only as a monument to her glorious past, but as a symbol of the heroism and spirit which established our nation.

While “Old Ironsides” always stood unconquerable against hostile shot and shell and the fury of storm and



The CONSTITUTION



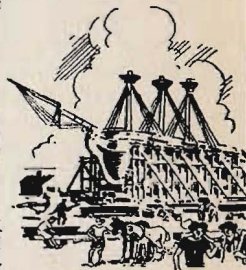
sea, she fought a losing battle against the ravages of time. Dry rot and decay in the passing years accomplished what the enemy had never been able to do, so that in March, 1925, it was necessary to undertake major repairs if the old frigate was to be preserved. The people of the country rallied to the cause generously to finance the work and, in 1930, Congress, by appropriating \$300,000 to complete the task, assured her preservation as a fitting memorial to the glory of the Navy and the seamen of long ago.

Establishment of our Navy

"To secure respect to a neutral flag requires a naval force organized and ready to vindicate it from insult and aggression."

—GEORGE WASHINGTON.


Because of the unsettled condition of the Union and the deplorable state of our finances following the Revolutionary War, it was impossible then to consider the problem of National defense. The old Continental Navy was sold or disposed of. At the outbreak of war between France and Great Britain in 1793, the United States faced a grave situation; for both countries persisted in interfering with our neutral merchant ships, while each sought our alliance against the other. To maintain our neutrality without an armed naval force was an impossibility. The situation with the Barbary pirates was likewise menacing, as they were demanding yearly tribute from us for non-interference with our commerce.



Decidedly were we in need of a naval armament. In

1794, five years after the adoption of the Constitution and the beginning of our government, Congress passed an act authorizing the building or purchase of six war vessels.

Building the Constitution

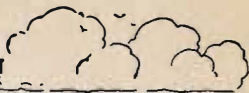


One of the first three ships built under this act was the **CONSTITUTION**, named for the great bulwark of our government. Mr. Joshua Humphreys, a talented ship-builder of Philadelphia, was the designer. He reasoned that the number of ships the United States could support would be far less than the number owned by European countries and therefore our ships would need to be just so much faster and better. He combined the best features of the French and English ships, and the excellence of his design is proved by the beauty, strength and intrepidity of the **CONSTITUTION**.

The **CONSTITUTION** was built longer and broader than the existing type of frigate, and higher out of water. Her length over all was 204 feet and her breadth of beam, 45 feet 2 inches. Her displacement was 2250 tons. She was heavily ballasted, and designed to carry a large supply of powder and solid shot; her wooden tanks and casks held 48,600 gallons of fresh water and there was storage room for six months' provisions for a crew of 475 officers and men. Her length and stability allowed for a vast spread of canvas and great speed, so that she could always lead ahead and was never forced to go into action but on her own terms, except in a calm. Her log book of 1809 shows a speed of $12\frac{1}{2}$ knots an hour.



The CONSTITUTION



The live oak, red cedar, white oak, pitch pine, and locust, of which she was constructed, came from states ranging from Maine to South Carolina and Georgia. The heavier part of her original battery came from Maryland and Connecticut. Truly she was a National ship, reared from the strongest and best of our virgin forests. No other nation used live oak in shipbuilding. Today only about fifteen per cent of the original ship exists; all the rest has been restored at various times, but it is the live oak, forming the backbone of the ship, which has virtually kept it together and made it possible to restore and rebuild it.

The copper bolts and spikes were supplied by Paul Revere, who wrote to the Secretary of War that he could furnish them "as cheap as anyone."

The heavier guns of the CONSTITUTION were a new departure in frigate battery. Other frigates carried 18-pounders, while the CONSTITUTION was equipped with 24-pound guns. Originally designed as a 44-gun frigate, she actually carried 54 guns, and in the battle with the GUERRIÈRE had thirty long 24-pounders on the gun-deck, sixteen 32-pound carronades on the quarter-deck, and on the forecastle, six 32-pound carronades, and two 12-pounders as bow chasers.

The keel was laid in Boston, at Hartt's Shipyard, near what is now Constitution Wharf. Colonel George Claghorn was in charge of the building. It was three years from the laying of the keel to the launching. The total cost was \$302,917, a small sum in comparison with the thirty or forty millions which are now spent upon our modern battleships. The launching took place October



21, 1797, at the third attempt to launch her, due to the settling of the ways under the moving load.

The Constitution Sails Against French Cruisers and Privateers

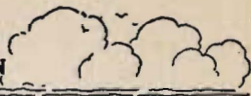
In 1798, French cruisers were interfering with our commerce to such an extent that while we did not actually declare war on France, all treaties between the two governments were abrogated and American cruisers were commissioned to patrol the coast and West Indies and capture French vessels. In August, the *CONSTITUTION*, under Captain Samuel Nicholson, sailed in search of French armed vessels but accomplished little except to test the ship and train the crew, as smaller boats were more effective in running down French privateers.

War with Tripoli

For centuries, the four Barbary States, Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, had levied tribute on even the most powerful European nations and, if payment was refused, had captured the ships of the offender and dragged off the crews to slavery. Since 1785, when Algerian corsairs had seized American merchant ships, holding their crews for ransom, the United States had suffered outrageous indignity and insult at the hands of the Barbary pirates. More than a million dollars in presents and money had been paid to the Dey of Algiers, in addition to an annual tribute of \$22,000. The Pasha of Tripoli, enraged because the Dey of Algiers was receiving more tribute and attention than he, cut down the flagstaff at the American consulate, May 14, 1801, thus declaring war.



The CONSTITUTION



“Millions for Defense, but not one cent for Tribute”

Two squadrons had been sent to the Mediterranean before the CONSTITUTION, as Commodore Edward Preble's flagship, arrived there in 1803, with a fleet of war vessels to blockade the port of Tripoli. At the outset misfortune overtook the Americans. The PHILADELPHIA, a 36-gun frigate, while chasing a Tripolitan cruiser, struck a reef, and, helplessly aground, was captured by the enemy gunboats. The officers and men were taken prisoners, and several days later the pirates managed to float the PHILADELPHIA so that they now had against us a more formidable vessel than they had ever possessed.

In the cabin of the CONSTITUTION, plans were laid for one of the most daring expeditions in our history. Using a captured Tripolitan ketch, Lieutenant Stephen Decatur and approximately seventy-four officers and men, in the dead of night, crept into the harbor of Tripoli and alongside the PHILADELPHIA, fully armed and manned, moored within range of all the batteries of the fort and surrounded by Tripolitan cruisers, galleys, and gunboats. A false move and they would have been blown to atoms. Except for six or eight of the crew disguised as Maltese sailors, the men were concealed as the little ketch boldly drifted toward the great hulk of the PHILADELPHIA and the pilot informed the sentinel that they had lost their anchors and wished to make fast to the cables of the PHILADELPHIA





for the night. The ruse succeeded until one of the pirates, peering from the PHILADELPHIA's rail, caught sight of the men lying on the ketch's deck. Instantly the cry, "Americanos! Americanos!" resounded through the ship, but before the pirates could gather themselves together, the Americans, with cutlasses in hand, swarmed over the PHILADELPHIA in a hand-to-hand struggle with the pirates. In ten minutes the ship was captured and the firing of it had started; for there was not a chance of escaping with it. The work of destruction was quickly done and the men regained their boat. Their escape seems a miracle, for the whole harbor was awake and the burning ship illuminated the bay, but not one American was killed.

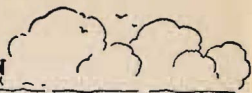


Equally thrilling and dramatic are other tales of heroism and daring, when for a month (August 4–September 4) Preble's squadron again and again bombarded the Tripolitan fortifications and gunboats, the CONSTITUTION firing upon the batteries and the town, while the smaller boats attacked the corsairs, and the men fought hand to hand with the pirates. Enemy fire caused some damage to the CONSTITUTION's rigging and sails and her mainmast was struck down once. The wounded were carried aboard the CONSTITUTION and the prisoners were also confined there.

On September 10, Commodore Barron superseded Preble in command; later he was succeeded by Captain John Rodgers. The blockade continued, although the CONSTITUTION, in November, was sent to Lisbon to



The CONSTITUTION



recruit and repair. But she returned to the blockade the following March as Captain Rodgers's flagship. In her cabin, the peace treaty was drawn up — signed June 3, 1805 — by which tribute to Tripoli ceased and the American captives were surrendered. Meanwhile the Dey of Tunis had been threatening trouble and Captain Rodgers anchored there and dictated a treaty with Tunis, ending tribute with that country.

The War of 1812

The CONSTITUTION, tested in the wars against the French privateers and Barbary pirates, was now to achieve her greatest renown when, in the War of 1812, she stood invincible against the English Navy and fought for our independence on the sea as, two generations before, the colonists had fought for it on land.

Great Britain's hostile attitude toward our neutral commerce had reached the point that our National honor was at stake. Her persistent impressment of American sailors into her navy was an outrage; over six thousand American citizens had been impressed into the British service. On June 18, 1812, war was declared.

Great Britain reigned supreme on the sea, and our small array of seventeen war vessels against a thousand and more of the English Navy seemed almost ludicrous. English naval officers had been most contemptuous of our ships, criticizing their heavy batteries and implying that their designs were clumsy and too heavy for rapid manœuvring. The American "fir-built frigates," as they were called, were the subject of much ridicule.



Soon they were to have greater respect for the iron-built CONSTITUTION and her sister ships, as one after another of their own ships went down before them.

The Constitution Escapes from a British Squadron

Three days after war was declared, the CONSTITUTION, commanded by Captain Isaac Hull, left Washington for New York to join Captain Rodgers's squadron. On July 17, off the New Jersey coast, five sails to the northward were sighted and Captain Hull, supposing them to be the American squadron, headed for them. Early the next morning, Hull discovered that he had given chase to an English squadron; to make matters worse, there was little or no breeze. The British, now joined by two more vessels, hoisted their colors and gave chase; as they ran into some breeze, they gained at first. Some of the frigates started firing and the Americans returned the fire. The situation was desperate until Captain Hull made use of a kedge anchor. The kedge, fastened to a long line of hawsers and ropes, was dropped ahead and, by hauling on the ropes, the men gradually drew the ship ahead to the anchor, which was taken up, carried one-half mile or more and dropped again. Whenever the wind failed, they "kedged," until gradually they got beyond range of the British guns. The British were quick to imitate, but not before the CONSTITUTION was in the lead. With marvellous manœuvring, Captain Hull, after two days during which all hands remained constantly on deck, outdistanced the enemy, and the CONSTITUTION headed for Boston.



The CONSTITUTION



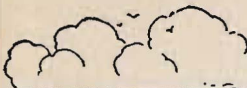
Battle with the Guerrière

"Her sides are made of iron!"

From Boston the CONSTITUTION put to sea on August 2, and sailed along the coast of Nova Scotia to Cape Race, where she captured and destroyed two British merchant ships. On August 19, off the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a sail was sighted which later proved to be the GUERRIÈRE, a British 44-gun frigate (mounting 49 guns). The CONSTITUTION made for her with all sail set, and when still far astern, the GUERRIÈRE began firing. Only a few shots were fired in return, and the CONSTITUTION bore down upon the enemy in silence. Impatiently the men stood at their quarters, the gunners awaiting the order to fire. Not until the ships were fairly abreast did Captain Hull give the word, "Now, boys, pour it into them!" A whole broadside struck the GUERRIÈRE and then another. In ten minutes her mizzenmast went over. The CONSTITUTION passed ahead and crossed the enemy's bow and sent a raking broadside crashing down the entire length of the enemy's decks, which cut away the foremast and most of the rigging.



The story is that shots from the GUERRIÈRE made no impression upon the outside planking of the CONSTITUTION, but fell into the sea, whereupon one of the sailors shouted, "Huzza! her sides are made of iron!" and thus gave her the renowned title, "Old Ironsides." The flag on the topgallant masthead of the CONSTITUTION was



"Old Ironsides"



shot away and an Irish lad, John Hogan, climbed up amid a shower of bullets and lashed it to the mast.

The GUERRIÈRE's bowsprit fouled the lee mizzen rigging of the CONSTITUTION and both sides tried to board, but the sea was rolling too heavily. The GUERRIÈRE fired point blank into the cabin of the CONSTITUTION and set it on fire, but the flames were quickly extinguished. As the ships separated, the GUERRIÈRE's foremast and mainmast went by the board and she was left a helpless hulk. Captain Dacres struck his flag in surrender and when the Americans boarded the ship they found her in such a crippled condition that they had to transfer the prisoners and burn her. The British lost 79 in killed and wounded while the Americans lost 14.



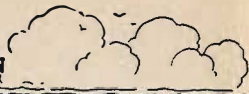
It was a dramatic victory for America and for the CONSTITUTION. In half an hour (the entire battle lasted only thirty minutes) the United States "rose to the rank of a first-class power," and the country was fired with fresh confidence and courage; and union among the States was greatly strengthened.

Destruction of the Java

On December 29, less than five months after the GUERRIÈRE was destroyed, the CONSTITUTION, commanded by Commodore William Bainbridge, won a similar victory over the JAVA, a British 38-gun frigate, about thirty miles off the coast of Brazil. Firing started with broadsides from both ships. The CONSTITUTION—her wheel shot away at the beginning of the fighting—had to



The CONSTITUTION



do some clever manœuvring to avoid being raked. The American gunnery proved superior; in two hours the JAVA was completely dismasted and helpless. Captain Lambert was mortally wounded and his successor surrendered. Hopelessly wrecked, the JAVA met the same fate as the GUERRIÈRE and was burned. The triumphant CONSTITUTION reached Boston the end of February, where there was great rejoicing over her victory and her gallant crew. Except for a short cruise under Captain Charles Stewart, "Old Ironsides" was shut in the Boston harbor for eight and a half months by the strenuous British blockade.

The CONSTITUTION now never lacked for a picked crew as she was considered a "lucky ship" and there was great competition to get aboard her.

Capture of the Cyane and the Levant

The last great fight of the CONSTITUTION was thrilling and spectacular, for she engaged two ships, the frigate-built CYANE and the sloop LEVANT (February 20, 1815) and exhibited very skillful manœuvring: running and backing from one ship to the other, and fighting each separately, while avoiding being raked. The British ships were smaller and lighter and their batteries less effective, and both surrendered after a hard-fought battle. Homeward bound with her two prizes, "Old Ironsides" made one of her famous escapes. Chased by a British squadron, she narrowly escaped ending her days as an English ship, but her good luck and good seamanship saved her, although the LEVANT was retaken by the British.

Captain Stewart, having ascertained that the war was over (actually the treaty of peace with England had been ratified February 17, three days before his engagement



with the CYANE and LEVANT) sailed for home and anchored the CONSTITUTION at New York, May 15, 1815. Her war service had ended and she had played a truly glorious part in establishing our freedom on the seas.

The End of Her Active Service

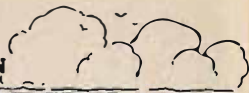
The battle-scarred ship was laid up about six years for extensive repairs, whereupon she went on two cruises to the Mediterranean. In 1830, she was reported unseaworthy and condemned to be broken up, but a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, called "Old Ironsides," aroused such popular feeling that money was appropriated for rebuilding her in 1833. At this time the dispute over the Andrew Jackson figurehead was waged. The first figurehead, a statue of Hercules, had been shot away at Tripoli. The story of the decapitation of the much opposed Andrew Jackson figurehead on the heavily guarded ship, by a daring young fellow, under cover of a thunderstorm, is well known.

From 1835 to 1855, the CONSTITUTION made numerous voyages, the most important being her cruise around the world in 1844-45, under Captain John Percival, when she covered 52,279 miles in 495 days at sea.

With the progress of shipbuilding during the Civil War, when the old type of sailing frigate gave way to the steam-propelled MONITOR, the crude beginning of the modern battleship, the oak-ribbed, white-winged CONSTITUTION rapidly became a relic of the past. For several years, she was used by the Naval Academy as a training and practice ship. In 1871, she was rebuilt at Philadelphia, and in



The CONSTITUTION



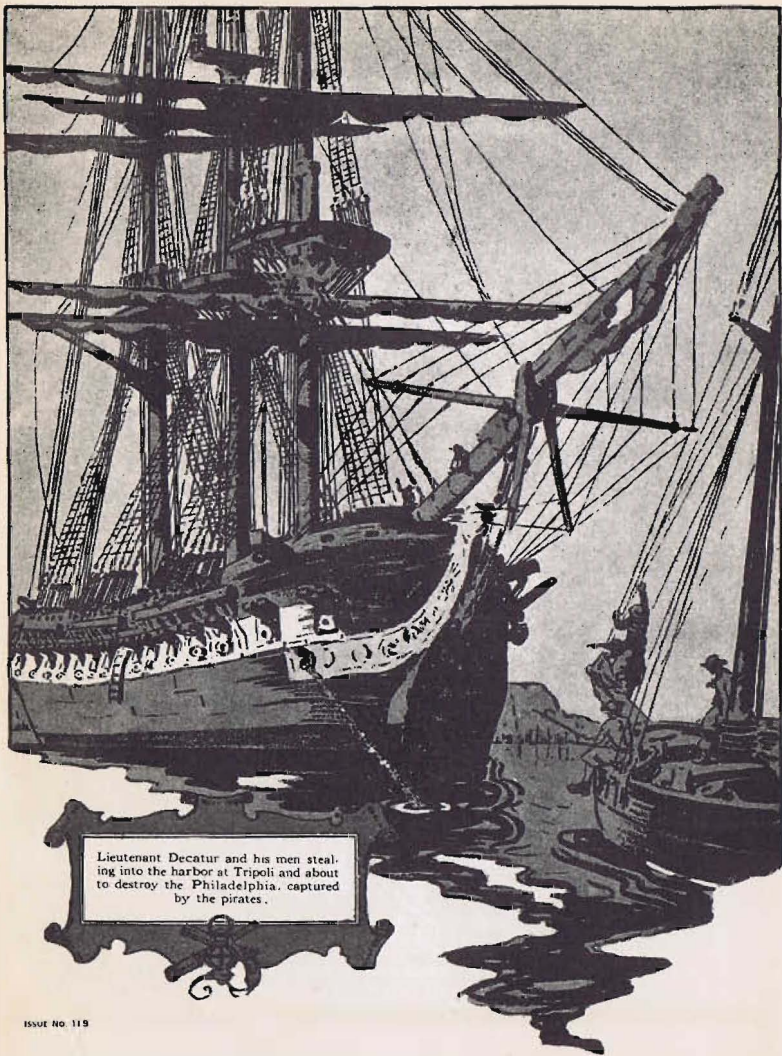
1878 went on her last trip abroad, carrying goods sent by citizens of the United States to the Universal Exposition at Paris. Her long active career at sea closed in 1881.

"May the spirit of 'Old Ironsides' go sailing on!"

From Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where she was used as a receiving ship, the CONSTITUTION was brought to Boston, her birthplace, for the celebration of her centennial in 1897. Again threatened with destruction in 1905, because her timbers were gradually rotting away, public sentiment came to her rescue and she was partially restored. But the ravages of time continued and in 1925 plans were made for a complete renovation of the proud old warrior.

At the Boston Navy Yard, Charlestown, "Old Ironsides" was completely rebuilt from truck to keel. After such an eventful and renowned career as the champion of American liberty, small wonder it is that Americans have been anxious to preserve this venerable ship. Funds for the restoration were generously subscribed by the people of America, a large part of which was raised by school children, and the balance necessary was appropriated by Congress, so that we may now feel a closer ownership and interest in this gallant old ship on whose decks are enshrined the proud traditions of the American Navy and of the American people.

After a tour of the important seaports of the United States that started at Boston, July 2, 1931, covering over twenty-two thousand miles, "Old Ironsides" returned to the Boston Navy Yard on May 7, 1934, to remain indefinitely. In honoring "Old Ironsides," we honor not only the ship itself but the men who by their bravery and skill brought her to such renown and made such glorious history for America.



Lieutenant Decatur and his men stealing into the harbor at Tripoli and about to destroy the Philadelphia, captured by the pirates.



Presented by

John Hancock
MUTUAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

