



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2024.06.15

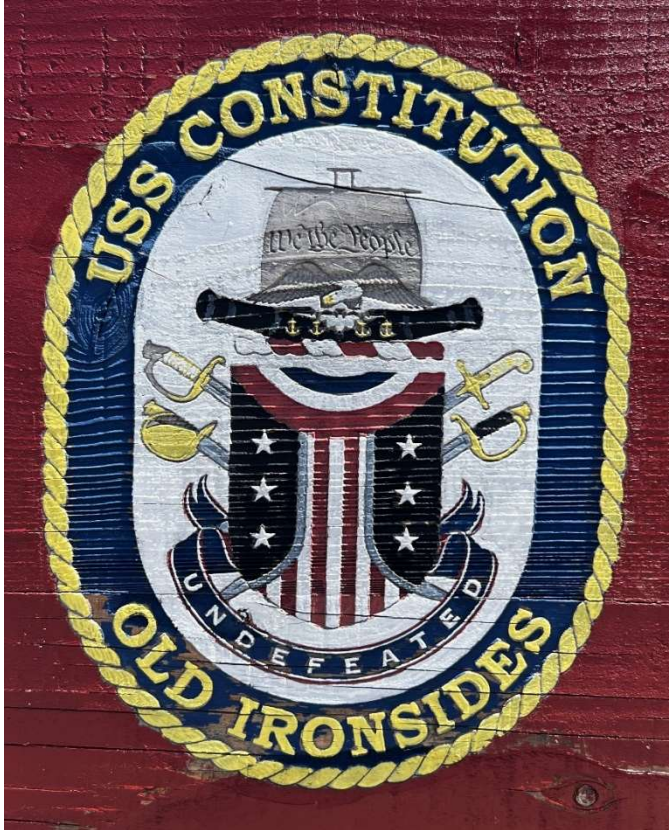
Boston National Historical Park, Charlestown, Massachusetts



While Blue Maxx underwent his surgery at Don & Wally's in Norwood MA, I made the temporary move into Big Bro Bob's domicile. I actually slept in a real house, in a real bedroom, in a real free-standing bed, for the first time in ... seven years? Yeah. 2017 was the last time, I think.

The Shed, my last Key West home, was a studio cottage where the bedroom was also the kitchen and the living room, kinda like Maxx, but just a smidgen bigger: 250 square feet, for almost \$2000 a month. No wonder I opted for VanLife. Not all that much smaller, much more mobile, and a **whole lot** less expensive.

Anyway, when I mentioned to Bob that I was thinking about going to see the USS Constitution because I had never done that in my 39 years as a Boston area resident, he surprised me by saying he never had either, and he had lived here all his life. Thus, it was decided that we'd go together, along with his wife, Rexan. She had lived most of her life in the Philippines, so she had never seen it and was eager to add it to her list.



If there had been any hesitation, that was allayed when I discovered that the tour was free. Yes, **free!** It makes sense, though, right? The whole Revolutionary War thing was a quest to be free. So, yeah.

Parking was another issue, though. We could have driven around Charlestown for an hour looking for a meter to park at, then walk a mile to BNHP, but it made a whole lot more sense to just pull into the parking garage across the street and pay the \$20.

Parking garage?? Yeah, I should have mentioned that we took his car; Blue Maxx was in the repair shop. Also, three of us could not have ridden in BM the PM anyway; he has no passenger seats.

Actually, we took his *wife's* car. His car could not have fit the three of us either: 1997 Porsche Boxster.

But anyway, we got to the big old boat. The weather was excellent, and we got there a bit after noon, so there was a decent-sized crowd there. We weren't crammed





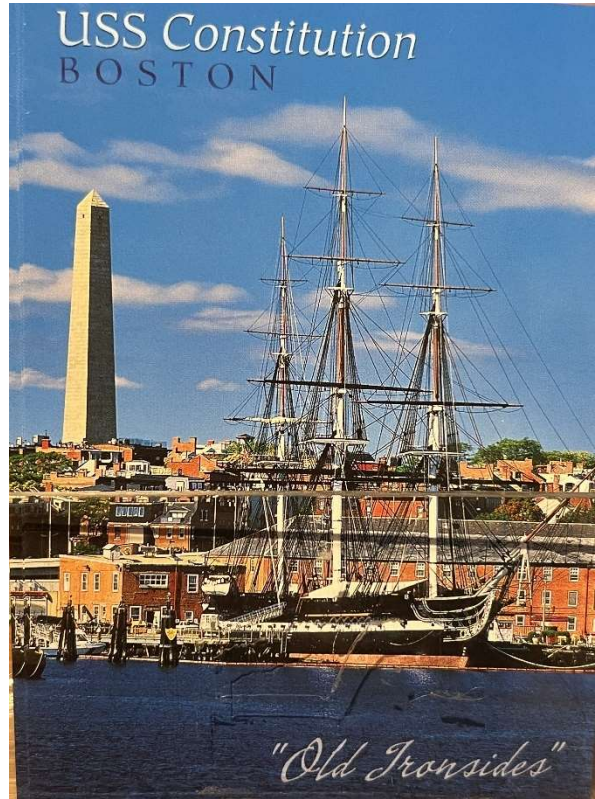
You can see from the book cover what Old Ironsides should look like. Whole lot more impressive, right? I mean, look at the photo above and tell me how the crew hung the sails.

But I'm sure they have their reasons. It must have been quite a project to detach



in or anything like that, but it was a challenge to get photos without John or Jane Q. Public stealing some of the scene.

I think I expected the ship to be a bit larger, but part of that was the lack of the upper masts. Those platforms should be about halfway up, not at the top. I'm not sure where those masts went, or why, but it did look a bit odd.



all of that. It would have been a much bigger "wow" to be looking straight up the full height of that main mast ... instead of ←←←← that.

But there was still plenty of boat left for self-guided touring. The guns, for instance.

There's something about looking at these enormously heavy cannons, all painted black and shining in the sunlight,

and remember that they were used to blow the living shit out of boats and people. Yeah, yeah, at war, them or us, I know.

But imagine standing on a boat and seeing the dark, round, black hole at the end of this iron beast pointing right at your face from 50 yards away, and then seeing a bright flash? You might hear the beginning of the blast, but your head would be gone before the full roar reached you. (Sounds travels at 1125 feet per second, and the ordnance zoomed from these barrels at 750 fps.)

Pleasant thought, yes? Well, you shouldn't tour a combat vessel without thinking about slaughtering your enemy. He was, after all, *totally evil*, right?

Turns out that the guns on the upper deck were only about half the size of the ones below on the aptly named Gun Deck.



I recently read a Q&A on Quora about guns like these on ships like these. If I recall correctly, each gun required a five-man team load and fire it, and good teams could shoot as many as four payloads per minute. (Something like that anyway; I can't find the Q&A right now.)



The stairs between decks are steep. Signs instruct you to walk down a certain way, suggesting that you descend with your back to the stairs.

That seems awkward, but the opening in the deck is only so big and you are almost guaranteed to whack the back of your head on it if you face towards the steps.



Descending further, we discovered the Berth Deck. There are a few actual rooms down here, though not many. The captain had his own tiny chamber, and there was an eating room, and a couple other mystery rooms.

Most of the deck was open space, like the Gun Deck was, but without the guns.

The aft half of it, though, was where the

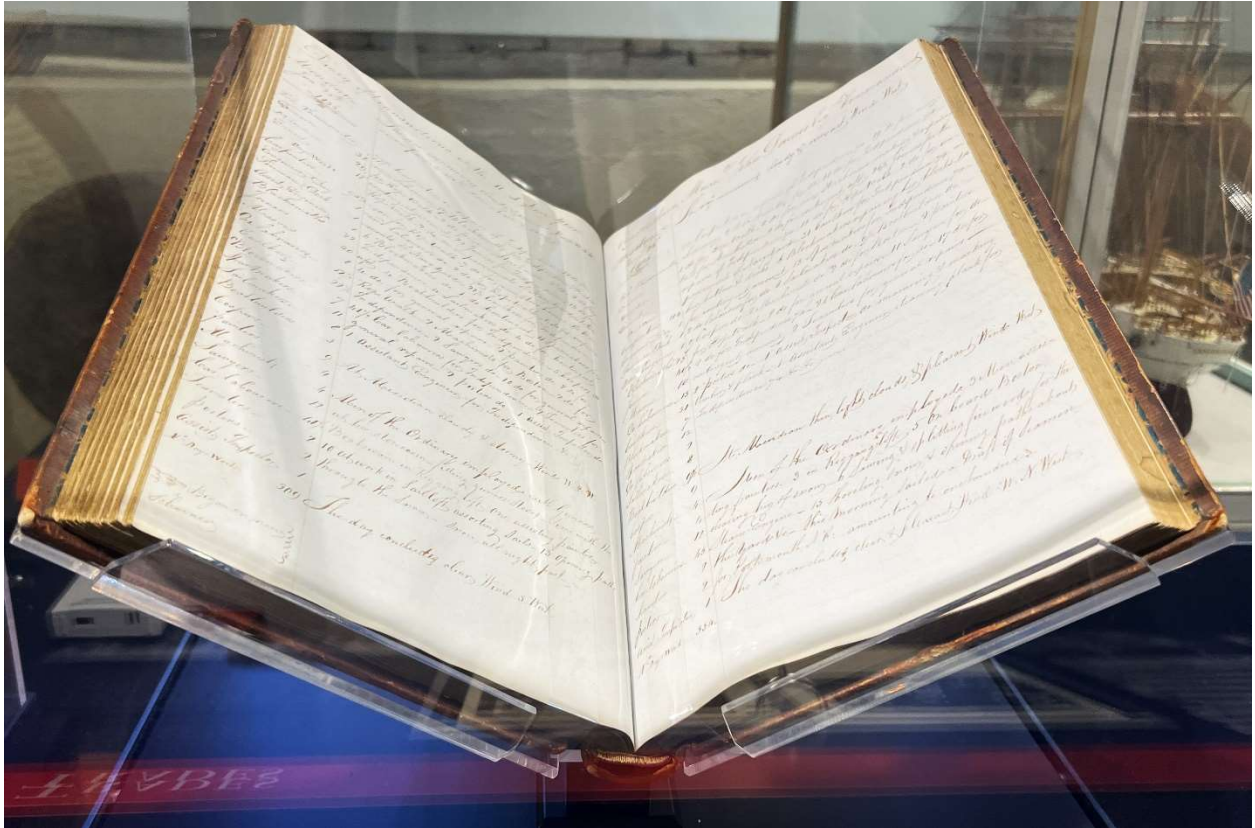
crew slept. It was eye-opening. They slept in hammocks, just a foot or two apart. Row after row after row of them.



I can see lazing away a summer afternoon swinging placidly in a hammock strung between two shady trees, but sleeping all night in one, surrounded by 70 other men, on a rocking and pitching sea, well, that's a whole 'nuther deal, iddinit?

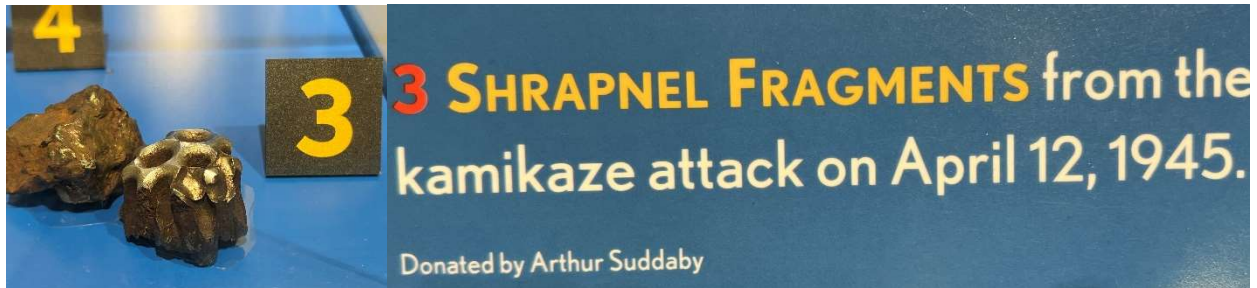
Maybe loosely swinging hammocks are actually more stable than fixed bunks would be. If the sea gets rolling, you'd get rolled off your bed. Hammocks, though, would sway with the rolls, keeping you more level, almost like a gimbal on a camera.







There is more than one ship at BNHP. The *USS Cassin Young*, a World War 2 destroyer is also berthed there. The ship engaged in seven Pacific battles and survived two Kamikaze hits.



Self-guided tours were free, but they were limited to the main deck. Access to the upper areas was only possible with a guided tour, which cost money. We never asked how much; we were in Free Only Mode.







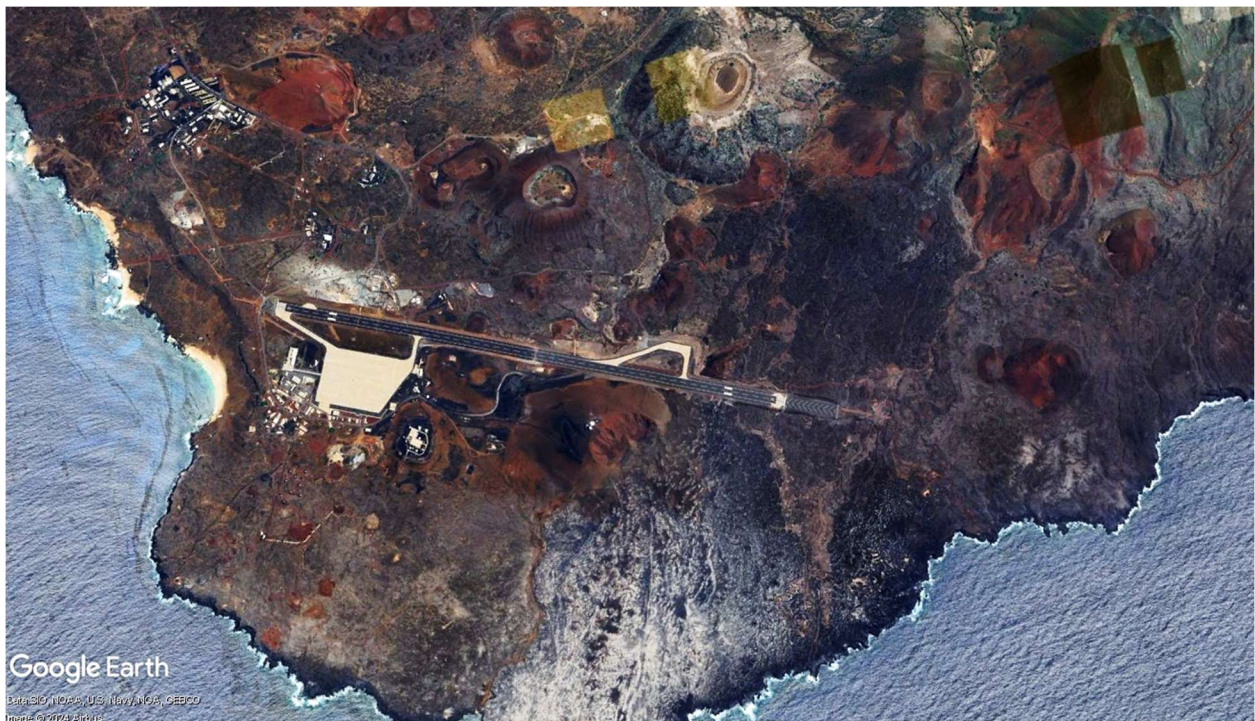


The radio room was of special interest to Bob and me. Our dad was a radio operator in WWII, albeit in the Army Air Corps. In that capacity, he also served as navigator; courses to destinations were often determined by triangulation of radio signals. Flying west out of Africa, he was able to pinpoint the speck of land called Ascension Island – just 7 miles by 8 miles (about the size of the city of Boston) -- 1600 miles away, using just those signals.

Using Google Earth, I was able to show him how impossible that seems to me.



I was even able to show him the airstrip that he used (albeit much improved).





The typewriter in the Radio Room – which, no doubt, would be called the Communications Center now – was a kick too. I have no idea why the king, queen, and jack of hearts are on the desk, but I'm sure there is some significance to them.



The guns on the *Constitution* were pretty mean looking, but this monster on the foredeck of the *Cassin Young* dwarfs those. You're never going to have to worry about staring down this muzzle from fifty yards away, though. This 5", 38-caliber gun would blast your ass to a spray of random molecules from eight miles away.

To get to Old Ironsides, we had had to pass through the Boston Historic National Park Visitor Center. We just strode right through, though, preferring to see the (not-so) tall ship and the more destroyer first. So, with those satisfactorily toured, we did take time to check it all out.



The exhibit that showed the size of the anchor chains of the *Cassin Young* amazed me the most. A single link weighed 360 pounds! And the chain itself had a break load of more than 2.5 million pounds! Dammmmn!

I have no idea how long an anchor had to be. It had to reach all the way to the sea floor, right? You're still in Massachusetts Bay and you have a max depth of about 250 feet (at Stellwagan Banks). If you

anchor there, you'd need about 150 links. A ton is just 6 links, so that's 25 tons (50,000 pounds) just to anchor in the Bay.

Just beyond that, Wilkinson Basin drops to a depth of more than 800 feet. Can you really drop anchor there? Most likely you can't, right? How could you possibly carry that much chain, weighing that much per link? Where do you keep it all? Boggles my mind.



There's a full-fledged museum at BHNP too. There was an admission charge, so we took a pass on it. There is also a little mini-golf layout in front of the museum.

The park includes the famous Charlestown Shipyard, and it extends well up into Charlestown to the Bunker Hill Monument.

That was a bit of a hike, so we decided that we would walk in the other direction, along the Harborwalk, through Paul Revere Park, beside the Zakim Bridge, past TD Garden (home of the Celtics and Bruins), to a bar called Night Shift Brewery. (So much for Free Only Mode -- \$9 per beer for Bob and me.)

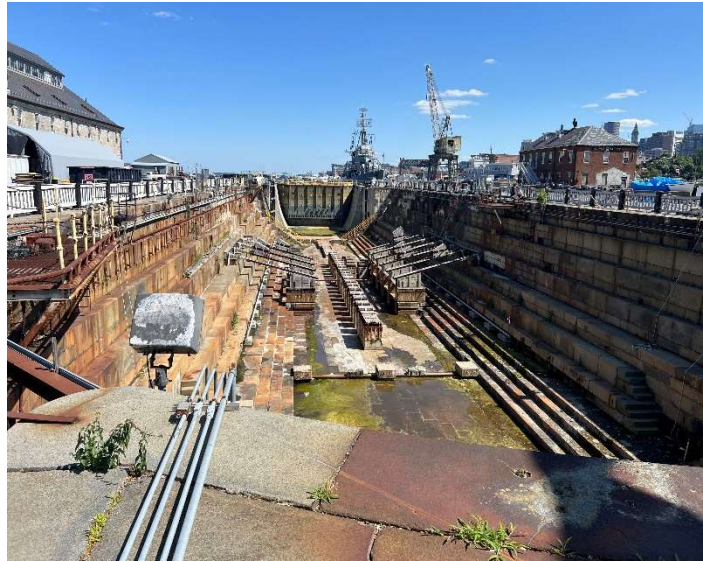




Top Left: Bunker Hill Monument



Top Right: BNHP Mini-Golf



Right: Charlestown Shipyard

Below: Zakim Bridge



