

## **The Patriot Who Fought Like A Pirate**

“It seems to be a law of nature, inflexible and inexorable, that those who will not risk cannot win.” - John Paul Jones (U.S. Naval Academy).

This was the mindset of John Paul Jones, a naval patriot known for being a brilliant tactician and military leader and using innovative methods to defeat the British Navy. Often called the “Pirate Patriot”, he fought like a pirate, winning battle after battle by the skin of his teeth. Through these victories, he began to convince America that a strong navy was necessary to a strong country, earning him the title of “Father of the United States Navy”. To this day, his influence is still seen, as our current navy uses many of the tactics John Paul Jones employed during the late 1700s.

John Paul was born in Scotland to a gardener at the estate of Arbigland in 1747 (Sperry). John Paul started his maritime career at the young age of 13 in the British Merchant Marines. He moved up through the ranks, eventually becoming the captain of a vessel in the West Indies, but, after killing the ringleader of a mutinous crew, he fled to America to escape trial and changed his name to John Paul Jones (Morison).

When the Revolution broke out, he went to Philadelphia and was commissioned as a lieutenant in the new Continental Navy (Morison). As First Lieutenant on *Alfred*, he was the first to hoist the Grand Union flag on a Continental warship (“A Founder of the U.S. Navy”). Lending to his pirate mystique, he stole clothing and coal from the British ships he defeated and gave the spoils to members of the Continental Navy (Sperry). After proving his merit on the *Alfred* in 1776, he was promoted to captain of the *Providence*, where he reported an impressive tally of 16 British vessels captured or destroyed (Callo). While many American captains were

thinking only of how their ship could survive the battle, Jones strategized about how he could best attack the enemy boats. When he was captain of the *Providence*, Jones began to think about the future of the American navy. He believed that, without a respectable navy, America would be weak and easy to attack. He sent letters to the influential Congressman Robert Morris, hoping to convince him to bring the idea of a powerful navy to Congress. He was captain of the *Providence* until 1778, when he was given command of a new ship, the *Ranger* (Callo).

John Paul Jones' fame began on the *Ranger*, when he dauntlessly invaded the British coast. Jones was a shrewd strategist who understood psychological warfare more than most other captains of the Revolutionary War. Jones was outraged by the British attacks on unarmed American towns and planned to attack the British homeland (Thomas). No British town had been burned by foreign raiders for more than a century and Jones hoped to change that. He knew how much the British believed in the power of their navy to protect them and also knew how he could crush that belief.

In 1778, Jones launched an attack on the coastal town of Whitehaven with only 30 of his men, as the others did not wish to join him (Thomas). Jones put a torch to one of the 200 ships in the bay, fled to the *Ranger* with the rest of his men, and set sail for Scotland. His plan was to capture the Earl of Selkirk, conveying a message to the British that nobody was safe. Fortunately for the Earl, he was on vacation in England when Jones attacked his home. Despite this, Jones reluctantly allowed his crew to steal from the rich man's home, still causing fear throughout Britain (Thomas). Though the mission was overall a failure, as the townsfolk put out the fire and the crew failed to capture the Earl, the psychological impact of Jones' raids on the British coast was massive. Jones wrote about the benefits of the attacks in a letter to

Benjamin Franklin, saying that the raids were, “sufficient to show that not all their boasted navy can protect their own coasts.” (Thomas). These raids established his reputation as the “Pirate Paul Jones”, pictured in the press as a ruthless buccaneer, fighting for liberty against an oppressive enemy. Though the press gave him this barbaric image, Jones was a reasonable man, going so far as to return the goods his crew stole to the rightful owners (Thomas).

Jones’ next famous mission was in 1779, in a ship provided to him by the French, called the *Bonhomme Richard*. Jones was deployed off the Irish coast to prey on British shipping vessels (Callo). This mission culminated when he engaged in combat with the HMS *Serapis*, under Captain Richard Pearson. The *Serapis*, a naval warship, was superior to the *Bonhomme Richard*, an old merchant’s vessel. Jones attacked the powerful ship, taking heavy damage in the process. Still, Jones fought on, famously saying, “I may sink, but I’ll be damned if I strike!” (Callo). Jones and his men managed to out maneuver the *Serapis*, attaching grappling hooks to the warship and boarding. Pearson was forced to surrender and watch both ships sink into the ocean as the crews fled into surrounding French boats.

After this battle, Jones wrote Morris again about the future of the American navy, outlining a rank structure, a signaling system, and a naval constitution that would govern the growing U.S. fleet (Callo). He also suggested naval academies in order to educate the officers. Unfortunately, the money needed for these endeavors outlined in Jones’ letters did not exist and the support for his vision of the navy was not strong, but these ideas were later recognized as America began to grow into the world power it is today (Callo).

Despite his great achievements in life, John Paul Jones’ burial site was not honorable. His body was discovered in his Paris apartment shortly after his 45th birthday. Believing the

Americans would want to return his body and give him a formal burial, the French put the body in a coffin filled with alcohol to preserve it (Sperry). Unfortunately, the American ambassador in Paris disliked Jones and refused to fund Jones' return to America, so he was buried in France. The records of Jones' exact location were lost during the French Revolution. More than a century later, a former Civil War general, named Horace Porter, set out to find Jones' body and bring it back to America (Sperry). He found the burial in 1905 and was given funds to return the naval hero to the United States. John Paul Jones now lies in a crypt beneath the Naval Academy chapel in Annapolis, Maryland (Sperry).

The "Pirate Patriot" John Paul Jones had an incredible impact on the United States. As the "Father of the United States Navy", he helped create one of the most powerful naval forces in the world. In the Revolutionary War, he led battles that struck fear in the British and inspired Americans. John Paul Jones' legacy has a crucial influence on our country even two centuries after his death.

### **Bibliography (MLA Format)**

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