

Two Fathers of the American Navy

Theodore Roosevelt jumped at the chance to fund an archeological search for the body of John Paul Jones and appropriated funds in 1905. Jones had been resurrected in part because Teddy Roosevelt needed a hero. The young president, an avid naval historian, was eager to make the United States a great naval power at the turn of the twentieth century. Roosevelt wanted to celebrate Jones's legacy with pomp. Roosevelt wanted to make sure that the lessons of Jones's life were not to be lost on his countrymen and future leaders. "Every officer in our navy should know by heart the deeds of John Paul Jones" the president decreed. From then on, all midshipmen were required to memorize Jones's purported pronouncements on correct training and proper manners of an officer and a gentlemen.

John Paul Jones was a relentless self-promoter. He would have loved his splendid second funeral at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., with President Theodore Roosevelt reading the keynote address before a large assembly of dignitaries.

His first funeral, not so much.

John Paul Jones was born John Paul near Kirkbean, Scotland, on July 6, 1747. (He later added Jones.) He went to sea at 13, eventually finding his way to America. During the American Revolution he fought for his adopted country in the Continental Navy.

He had many successes at sea but his most famous was when his daring raids along the British coast. As commander of the *Bonhomme Richard*, he uttered his most famous words in the battle with the *HMS Serapis*. When the *Bonhomme Richard* began taking on water and fires broke out on board, the British commander asked Jones if he was ready to surrender. Jones replied, "Sir, I have not yet begun to fight!" Jones captured the British ship.

After the war, John Paul Jones fought with the Russian Navy. He moved to France in 1790, where he sank into obscurity.

He died in Paris on July 18, 1792, only 45 years old. His body was wrapped in a cloth, preserved in alcohol and placed in a lead coffin donated by a French admirer. A dreary funeral procession of servants and a few friends carried his remains to the St. Louis Cemetery for Alien Protestants. Jones was quickly forgotten. The cemetery was later used for animal fights and as a dumping ground for dead animals.

For more than 100 years Jones lay in a Paris cemetery. President Theodore Roosevelt, one of the Navy's greatest advocates, saw Jones as a valuable symbol in his ambition to make the Navy second to none in the world, and had Jones' remains returned to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1905. Roosevelt made a grand speech, extolling Jones' accomplishments. The president was the perfect champion for the brave but vain captain; in his daughter Alice's words, Roosevelt, like Jones, "wanted to be the baby at every christening, the bride at every wedding, and the corpse at every funeral."²⁶

Jones would have loved all this pomp. Jones admitted that "his desire for fame is infinite." Well, he met his wish in T. R.

Once, a White House visitor commented on Alice's frequent interruptions to the Oval Office, often because of her political advice. The exhausted president commented to his friend, author Owen Wister, after her third interruption to their conversation and threatening to throw her 'out the window', "I can either run the country or I can attend to Alice, but I cannot possibly do both."

Now enters Commodore John Barry:

Few Americans are well-acquainted with the gallantry and heroic exploits of Philadelphia's Irish-born naval commander, Commodore John Barry. Obscured by his contemporary, naval commander John Paul Jones, Barry remains to this day an unsung hero of the young American Republic. As most naval historians note, Barry can be classed on a par with Jones for nautical skill and daring, but he exceeds him in the length of service (17 years) to his adopted country and his fidelity to the nurturing of a permanent American Navy.

In the space of 58 years, this son of a poor Irish farmer rose from a humble cabin boy to senior commander of the entire United States fleet. Intrepid in battle, he was humane to his men as well as adversaries and prisoners.

Barry's war contributions are unparalleled:

- he was the first to capture a British war vessel on the high seas;
- he captured two British ships after being severely wounded in a ferocious sea battle;
- he quelled three mutinies;
- he fought on land at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton;
- he captured over 20 ships including an armed British schooner in the lower Delaware;
- he authored a Signal Book which established a set of signals used for effective communication between ships;
- and he fought the last naval battle of the American Revolution aboard the frigate *Alliance* in 1783.
- Barry can be classed on a par with Jones for nautical skill and daring, but he exceeds him in the length of service (17 years) to his adopted country.

In placing Barry at the head of the Navy, George Washington stated he had special trust and confidence "in [Commodore Barry's] patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities."

For centuries now, both academic and armchair historians have argued which of these naval heroes is more deserving of the title “Father of the American Navy.” The battle lines are most clearly drawn between their ethnic partisans: A member of the Saint Andrew’s Society is guaranteed to side with the Jones, just as a Friendly Son of Saint Patrick will favor the taller Barry. Some naval historians are not as swayed by Jones’ bravado. Taking a page from Barry’s **reserve**, as opposed to Jones’ **swagger**, they tacitly seem to side with the man they admiringly call “Silent John.” Naval exemplars such as Stephen Decatur, Jr., Richard Dale, Charles Stewart, Jacob Jones, and William Montgomery Crane, all who became commodores, started their naval careers under Barry’s watchful eye, as did Richard Somers, of (These men were involved in the Barbary wars as well as the war of 1812 when the US was establishing itself as an independent nation.)

Tripoli fame. Indeed, during the War of 1812, the *Port Folio* of Philadelphia, an influential American magazine at the time, wrote, “So many of the distinguished naval men of the present day commenced their career under Commodore Barry that he may justly be considered as ‘the father of our navy.’”

Barry and Jones took a similar approach to leadership from the ship. While they were both expert mariners, Barry was more popular with his men, but Jones is regarded as a better visionary with numerous letters to congress about ship designs and requesting a need for a naval academy. But all the clash and clamor takes away from one simple fact. In real life, while their calling prevented them from seeing much of the other, they were as friendly as two sea captains could be. They both shared meals and talked of their service in the American navy. Their last breakfast together was in May 1783. Barry and his ship the *Alliance* were stateside after another slew of captures and winning the Revolutionary War’s last battle at sea which were fought weeks after the Treaty of Paris ended the conflict. Jones was in such a state of ill health that Robert Morris canceled orders sending him to Boston to preside over a court-martial of Lieutenant Simpson. Over the meal, Barry told Jones he was sailing the *Alliance* to Holland on a merchantman’s errand, and Jones happily wrote a letter of introduction on Barry’s behalf to the appropriate people in Amsterdam, requesting that “as Captain Barry is an entire stranger to Holland any civilities you may show will be more Oblige.” They never saw each other again. Jones went on to serve in the Russian navy, Barry sailed to China. Then President Washington gave Barry the first captain’s commission in the United States Navy.

As it turned out, Barry and Jones were buried in respectively befitting manners. Jones final resting place would be the place of his dreams. He lies beneath the Naval Academy Chapel. His tomb is center stage encased in marble, a grand tribute but with one sad note. He is buried alone, the eternal warrior and bachelor.

In Philadelphia, Barry is buried at St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church with his wife Sarah, family and friends, in the city he adopted and that adopted him.

Both were different men but shared a kindred spirit. Both shared similar opinions of their fellow officers. When Barry died among his possessions was a cameo of John Paul Jones. He also bequeathed Jones’ gold sword to Richard Dale, the officer who served both of them so gallantly in the Revolution. You will find it by Jones’ crypt where you will also find Commodore Barry’s bible which is displayed at the altar.