

## Commodore Barry – Father of the American Navy

Contributed by Brian P. Hegarty Jr.

Few Americans are well-acquainted with the gallantry and heroic exploits of Philadelphia's Irish-born naval commander, Commodore John Barry. He was friends with his contemporary, naval commander John Paul Jones, but obscured by him as well. 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 length of service with 17 years to his adopted country and his fidelity to the nurturing of a permanent American Navy. Barry deserves the proud epithet, "Father of the American Navy," a title bestowed on him not by current generations of admirers, but by his contemporaries, who were in the best position to judge.

In the space of 58 years, this son of a poor Irish farmer rose from humble cabin boy to senior commander of the entire United States fleet. Fearless 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.

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."

On September 14, 1803, John Barry received his country's salute in a full military burial in Philadelphia's Old St. Mary's Churchyard. Such was the man, John Barry, a gallant mariner who served his Nation well and stood tall in the annals of American naval history.