

Captain John Paul Jones dies, July 18, 1792

On this day in history, July 18, 1792, Captain John Paul Jones dies. John Paul Jones was America's first naval hero for his exploits during the American Revolution. He was born in Scotland and began working as a sailor at the age of 13. Jones was soon serving on merchant and slave ships bound for America and the West Indies.

At the age of 20, Jones was on a voyage when the captain and first mate died during a yellow fever outbreak. After successfully leading the ship into harbor, the ship's owners were so grateful that they made him the captain. He made two successful voyages as captain before his career took a turn.

Jones had a sailor flogged for insubordination who died a few weeks later. He was arrested for the man's death and imprisoned for a time, having his reputation permanently tarnished. Some time later, Jones killed a sailor involved in a mutiny on his ship. He refused to sit for a court martial and fled Scotland for America.

Jones had a brother living in Virginia who died around this time and Jones took over his brother's affairs. After meeting several local politicians, Jones went to Philadelphia where the new United States Navy was just being formed. Jones was appointed first lieutenant of the Navy's flagship, USS Alfred.

After Alfred's initial voyage to the Bahamas, Jones was given command of the USS Providence. In six weeks, he captured 16 British ships. He went on to command a series of ships, wreaking havoc on the coast of British Nova Scotia and on British shipping.

In 1777, Jones was sent to France to assist the American commissioners there, Ben Franklin, John Adams and Arthur Lee. Jones became endeared to France and eventually set sail for England itself. Jones captured a number of British merchant ships, made the only

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American land attack on England in the war, captured the HMS Drake and tried to kidnap the Earl of Selkirk.

Jones terrorized the English coast and earned the reputation of a "pirate" in England. In 1779, he engaged the HMS Serapis in battle. Both ships were severely damaged. The Serapis surrendered, but Jones' own ship, the Bonhomme Richard, sank a few days later. Jones then sailed the captured Serapis into port.

As the American Revolution came to a close, but with his reputation tarnished from friction with America's political leaders, including John Adams, Jones looked for employment elsewhere. He served for a time in the navy of Empress Catherine II of Russia, fighting in their war against the Ottoman Turks in the Black Sea. Once again, though, disagreements and accusations stopped his advancement and Jones retired to France.

John Paul Jones lived in France for the rest of his life after 1790. He tried to regain employment in Russia and also with Sweden, but this never succeeded. In 1792, Jones was appointed US Consul to the Dey of Algiers, but he never fulfilled his mission. Jones passed away on July 18, 1792 in Paris. Jones' body was removed to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1913. He is considered America's first great naval hero and is often called the "Father of the US Navy."