



Scots who made their mark on.....

The Americas : 4 John Paul Jones



Scourge of the British Navy and American Naval Hero

The Scot history knows as John Paul Jones (1747–92) was born near Kirkbean in Kirkcudbrightshire as John Paul and later when in serious trouble used for a time the fairly anonymous "John Jones". Paul who was to gain international fame as the first great naval captain of the new American republic and whose remains are revered in the USA, was born into a family of modest means, his father being a gardener and his mother a maid.

He began his maritime career in 1760 when as a teenager he sailed from Whitehaven in Cumberland, a port he would revisit in dramatic and hostile circumstances eighteen years later. His older brother had already emigrated to Virginia in America and John Paul visited him on several occasions. He also served on a number of ships in the British maritime navy but no longer wishing to be a part of the slave trade he left the service in 1768 and sought new employment—propitiously as it turned out because when yellow fever claimed the lives of the two senior officers of the brig *John*, John Paul took over and made safe passage home. For this feat he was given a handsome monetary reward and made master of the *John* in his own right, aged only 21. However whilst he was in the West Indies his reputation was sullied after he was accused of excessive cruelty to one of his crew, who died as a result of his flogging. Not long after that John Paul killed one of his crew who was attempting mutiny and he had to go on the run, adopting the name John Jones, despite claiming he was acting in self-defence. This affair had led to loss of face, money and reputation and John Paul Jones now decided a complete change of life was required and joined the American Continental Navy, declaring that America was now his adopted country.

In late 1775 Jones was appointed 1st Lieutenant of the newly built 24-gun frigate *Alfred*, on which he was to have the honour of raising the first U.S. ensign, using the Grand Union Flag shown on USA 2000.



After taking part in the American fleet's raid on Nassau in the Bahamas, Jones was asked to take charge of the sloop *Providence* with the promise of command of a newly built frigate also in the wind. He now began a vigorous attack on British ships along the American north-eastern seaboard, taking 16 prize vessels, including in November 1776 one

carrying vital provisions for British troops preparing for the on coming harsh winter in Canada.

By now it will be clear to you that Jones was his own man with a fiery disposition and despite his courageous efforts throughout 1776 he was taken down several pegs by Commodore Esek Hopkins when he challenged him about strategy and was left to kick his heels in Boston for six months. However in June 1777 he was given command not of the promised large frigate but of the newly built but smaller 18-gun sloop *USS Ranger*, shown on Antigua 1976.



In this ship Jones sailed back across the Atlantic in November 1777 with a *carte blanche* remit to promote the American cause. He had now been promised by the American commissioners in France including Benjamin Franklin (USA 2006) and John Adams (later Second President of the USA)



(USA 1938) command of a new vessel being built for the Americans in Amsterdam and to be called *L'Indien*, but these plans were spiked by British pressure and Jones was again fairly inactive, though this enforced idleness permitted him much time in Franklin's influential society.

Then finally in early February 1778 France allied itself with the American cause against British imperialism and recognised the new country as an independent republic. Jones' *Ranger* then became the first American naval vessel to receive a nine-gun salute from the French.



Ivory Coast 1976 shows Jones anachronistically wearing his French Chevalier's uniform alongside a detail from Edward Moran's painting "The First to Salute the Stars and Stripes" (right)





Rwanda 1976 minisheet shows a panorama of the flight between Bonhomme Richard and HMS Serapis

In 1780 King Louis XVI honoured Jones with the title of Chevalier, a further decoration and an inscribed sword with golden hilt. The King is shown on USA 1978 greeting Benjamin Franklin and Jones is pictured in his Chevalier's uniform on USA 1979 which also carries his words "I have not yet begun to fight".

However being held in such high esteem did not secure Jones sustained further employment in the Continental Navy and he was asked to undertake relatively unexciting roles so in 1788 he entered the services of Catherine the Great of Russia (Russia 1913) and was now known as "Pavel Dzhones".



Russia 2004 shows Catherine II viewing her fleet from Inkermansky Palace, Crimea and Soviet Union 1971 shows the kind of ship of the line Jones was given command of.

As Rear-Admiral, Jones took charge of the 24 gun *Vladimir* fighting on the Black Sea against the Turks but envious Russian colleagues including Prince Potemkin (whose name was later associated with a famous battleship) forced Jones into the backwaters of St Petersburg and he was now in effect a salaried but under-used minion and he broke off his association with the Russian navy within the year.



Jones who clearly had an abrasive and blunt approach to colleagues (not unknown in Scots) and who had suffered from professional resentment throughout his life was now an embittered and poor man, having retired to Paris and although some diplomatic missions were being lined up for his attention he died in agony from nephritis in the Summer of 1792.

The site of his grave was sold four years after his death and the cemetery became a forgotten place, later used as a rubbish dump and a meeting place for gamblers. However just over a century later the US ambassador to Paris Horace Porter finally tracked down Jones' place of burial and his lead coffin containing his body preserved in alcohol presciently against the day the US might want it back.

At the start of April 1905 his remains were confirmed by forensic examination and President Theodore Roosevelt (USA 1922) arranged for an escort of seven battleships for the last stages of Jones' return to his adopted country. His body was given a place of honour at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland (USA 1949) and it now lies its chapel marked by marble and bronze.



Although Jones' personality and typical irascibility were not always those of noble fictional naval heroes such as Horatio Hornblower, Richard Bolitho and Jack Aubrey, because his life was peppered with disputation, jealousy and anger, the exploits of this Scot in a career which took him from 13-year old midshipman to hero and fleet commander could certainly have been the stuff of novels by C.S.Forester, Alexander Kent and Patrick O'Brian—but they of course were no fiction.



A statue of Jones, erected in Washington, D.C.



Edward Moran's painting, which appeared in *Look and Learn children's* magazine is entitled "First recognition of the Stars and Stripes, 14th February 1778", though as you can see from the caption on the 2000 American stamp the John Paul Jones flag is dated to the following year.

Jones was finally ready to take on the British in their own waters and in the Spring of that year he sailed up the Irish Sea intent on making an assault on Whitehaven out of which he had sailed as a novice aged 13. But the weather forced toward the Irish coast first and he proposed a direct assault on *HMS Drake* riding at anchor off Carrickfergus, though this was bungled and he had to turn tail. He then dropped two boats off Whitehaven and made an audacious assault on the small town hoping to set fire to much of it and the large merchant fleet in the harbour though this attempt also turned out to be just a modest success and Jones and his men escaped having set fire to only one coal-carrying ship. Jones' men then attempted to kidnap the Earl of Selkirk from St Mary's Isle off Kirkcudbright but he was away from home and they stole only some silver (which Jones purchased himself and returned later !)

Although these actions amount to little more than insults to British security, that an American fleet was loose in the Irish Sea, acting much like pirates spread great alarm and later in the month Jones returned to the Irish coast and captured *HMS Drake* requiring his second in command Lieut Simpson to take the ship to the French port of Brest. Because Jones believed Simpson had disobeyed his orders on the journey back to France he called for his court-martial but the American commissioners did not agree, believing that Jones was glory-hunting.

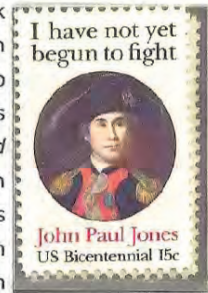
However, the following year Jones did receive a great promotion taking charge of the 42 gun *Bonhomme Richard*



donated to the American Continental Navy by a French entrepreneur. This ship is shown in handful of stamps relating to Jones, for example Malagasy 1975 (above).

As a fleet of French and Spanish vessels approached the English coast in mid-August 1779 Jones was tasked with creating a diversion by taking his squadron of five vessels into the Irish Sea, which attracted the attention of several Royal Navy ships which gave chase and Jones took both his own fleet and the chasing pack North around the coast of Scotland and south into the North Sea, even considering an attack on Leith as he sailed south, but it was prevented by wind direction. In late September the event occurred which made Jones a legend, and revered in naval history as he encountered the Royal Navy off Flamborough Head,

As dusk fell on September 23rd the captains of British vessels *HMS Serapis* and *Countess of Scarborough* with a combined fire power of seventy guns began the defence of their large merchant convoy by manoeuvring themselves between Jones's fleet and their charges. They were immediately engaged by *Bonhomme Richard* and the 36 gun *Alliance* and Jones brought his vessel hard up against *Serapis*, knowing he could not outgun her. His marksmen in the riggings systematically killed all in sight on the deck of the British warship. The *Alliance* then passed discharging its gun into the two vessels damaging Jones' vessel as well as the *Serapis* and with *Bonhomme Richard* well alight and fatally damaged the British Captain respectfully enquired if Jones would haul down his colours which brought the famous rebuttal with which



Jones has always been associated and quoted on USA 1979 and Grenada 1975. A British attempt to board the American vessel was repulsed and the *Serapis* badly damaged



when a magazine exploded below decks. When the American *Alliance* returned to the scene the game was up for the *Serapis* and the British commander gave up his vessel to Jones who took it over as his own began to sink and sailed it as a prize to Holland.

The encounter has inspired several stamps, most issued in connection with the Bicentenary of American Independence:



From top left clockwise USA 1936, Niger 1976, Nicaragua 1976, Samoa 1976 (captioned 'the ship that sank in victory') and St Lucia 1976 depicting *HMS Serapis* on its own.

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