

John Paul Jones Biography for Wreath Laying Ceremony

Friday, October 11, 2019

Courageous, tenacious and in Abigail Adams' words "bold, enterprising, ambitious and active." These are words that describe Naval War hero John Paul Jones, whom we are gathered here today, to pay tribute to.

This American Revolutionary War hero, known as the "Father of the United States Navy," and recipient of a Congressional Gold Medal for his "valor and brilliant services" during the Battle of Flamborough Head, is perhaps best known for the phrase "I have not yet begun to fight," his response to the British when he was asked if he wanted to surrender during the battle between the Bonhomme and H.M.S. Serapis.

Jones Paul was born July 6, 1747, in Arbigland, Scotland, to Jean and John Paul Sr. At the age of thirteen he knew that his calling was "at sea." Serving nine years as an apprentice, Jones experienced trading voyages to Africa and the West Indies before being placed in command of a ship in 1772 at the age of 25. In 1773, while in the Caribbean Island of Tobago, he was faced with the mutiny of his crew and when "threatened by the ringleader, he ran him through with his sword." In 1775 he resurfaced in Philadelphia, where it is noted that he had added the last name "Jones," to perhaps conceal his identity.

With the start of the American Revolution in April 1775, Jones sided with the colonists and was commissioned a lieutenant on the Alfred, where he hoisted the first American flag ever displayed (The Rattlesnake and Pine Tree Flag). He successfully commanded ships for the Continental navy and was commissioned as a captain in August 1776.

As commander of the Ranger, Jones made history as his was the first vessel to fly the new "Stars and Stripes." France, the first country to salute our country's flag, recognized Jones for his victory in defeating the British during the 1779 Battle of Flamborough Head, by honoring him with a Chevalier of the Order of Military Merit and presenting him with a gold-hilted sword. And in 1787, the United States honored Jones with a Congressional Gold Medal for the victory of the Bonhomme Richard.

Jones' expertise and reputation for his seafaring commands, found him accepting a post in 1788 from Catherine the Great of Russia, as rear admiral of her navy.

His return to Paris in 1790, found him in poor health and he passed away at the age of 45 on July 18, 1792.

Jones' body lay in a forgotten grave for 113 years in the Saint-Louis Cemetery (a "cemetery for foreign Protestants" in Paris), that officially closed in 1793. It was retired Civil War General Horace Porter, past president general of the Sons of the American Revolution, and U.S. Ambassador to France, who at his personal expense, conducted and persisted in the successful quest to find Jones' final resting place and remains, and to have them returned to the United States.

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution took a great interest in the return of Jones' remains. The American Monthly Magazine reported "The President General Mrs. Donald McLean, appointed a special committee on 'The flag for the remains of John Paul Jones.' It is fitting that he who first showed the stars and stripes to a foreign nation, should be borne back to the United States under the folds of the flag he loved so well. And it is fitting that the flag should be the gift of the Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution." (September 1905 American Monthly Magazine.)

On July 6, 1905, the anniversary of Jones' birth, his coffin was carried to the English church where a memorial service was held and then was placed in a crypt of the church to await transportation to the United States. "Later in the year a fleet of four United States navy ships arrived to convey the body to America, and the Daughters of the American Revolution provided a silken flag which afterwards was hung in Memorial Continental Hall. The memorial services were held on April 23, 1906. Jones was buried in the crypt under the chapel of the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

In his July 30, 1905 letter to President General McLean, Rear-Admiral Charles D. Sigsbee, U.S. Navy and Commander-in-Chief of the John Paul Jones Expedition, wrote of returning the flag. "The remains of John Paul Jones were transferred to me at Paris on July 6th and taken on board the Brooklyn, at Cherbourg, on July 9th, where the casket was placed under a canopy outside my cabin door. The national

flag provided by your society was placed over the casket, and there it remained during the entire return passage to Annapolis.

I now have the honor to return the flag to you, dear Madam, with its interest increased by historical association.” (September 1905 American Monthly Magazine)

As we gather here today at the statue of our country’s first great naval hero, we are standing in the same place where many stood on a mist-filled and rainy day on April 17, 1912 for the unveiling of this statue. Taking place the week of the twenty-first Continental Congress, a lot of interest was shown in this event by the NSDAR. Prominent among the magnificent floral tributes placed at the base of the statue was a wreath sent by President General Julia Green Scott. The statue of John Paul Jones was draped with a huge American flag, which “was drawn aside by Admiral Dewey, the national salute of twenty-one guns boomed out from the naval ships Dolphin and Mayflower, lying at anchor in the Potomac, and the entire naval and military forces of the District, with a brigade of midshipmen from Annapolis, rallied to the salute. President Taft as the principal speaker, and his thoughtful tribute was followed by an address by General Porter, former Ambassador to France.”

In General Porter’s words “John Paul Jones is the only commander in history, who ever landed an American force upon a European coast. He enjoyed the unique distinction of being the first to raise the American flag in its present form upon an American man-of-war; the first to receive a salute to the flag from a foreign power, and the first to raise it upon a hostile warship of superior strength captured in battle.”

(The American Monthly Magazine, July 1912.)

Today we perpetuate the memory and spirit of this great Patriot, John Paul Jones, who helped achieve American independence.