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**The Last Full Measure – John Paul
Jones**

Lead: For 400 years service men and women have fought to carve out and defend freedom and the civilization we know as America. This series on *A Moment in Time* is devoted to the memory of those warriors, whose sacrifice gave, in the words of Lincoln at Gettysburg, *the last full measure*.

Content: In the annals of the United States Navy, no name shines brighter than John Paul Jones. Born in Scotland in 1747, Jones was drawn to the sea and by 1772 was master of his own merchant ship, *Betsy*. In a

crisis of leadership, Jones' crew mutinied and Jones killed a crew member. Sensing that he would be held responsible, Jones fled to the American colonies where, attracted to liberty and the revolutionary cause, he offered his services and skills to the new Republic, receiving one of the first commissions issued by the Continental Navy.

He was a small man and throughout his career would exhibit a fiery temper and inspire resentment as well as deep devotion from his crews. Nevertheless, his vigor, competence and intensity impressed older leaders and soon he had the confidence of men such as Robert Morris, Thomas Jefferson, and

Benjamin Franklin. His greatest ship, *Bonhomme Richard*, was named after Franklin's most famous publication, *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

Facing the world's greatest Navy, the Continental sea dogs had to formulate a strategy based on lightning strikes in unlikely places designed to undermine morale in the enemy and draw away forces that might be used in the main theater of the war which was in America, almost like privateers of earlier era. In June 1777 Jones took command of *Ranger*, a 16 gun sloop, and soon Jones and *Ranger* were the scourge of the English coast in enhancing Jones's reputation and irritating the British naval brass.

Yet, it was on *Bonhomme Richard* that he made his greatest contribution to the American victory. On September 23, 1779 in the windy waters off Flamborough Head near York, England, Jones prevailed in a close encounter spit fight with the faster and more advanced HMS *Serapis*. Jones's tenacity along with his better trained and superior number of aggressive Marines carried the day. Jones's reply to *Serapis'* Capt. Pearson's inquiry "has your ship struck?" is remembered in naval lore to this day: "I have not yet begun to fight."

After the Revolution, the nation disbanded the Navy, but facing a

world full of threats eventually revived it. Unfortunately, Jones was no longer available to take a leadership role. After a brief stint as an admiral in the Russian Navy of Catherine the Great, he lived simply in Paris writing of his experiences and those of the Continental Navy until his death in 1792, probably of pneumonia provoked by nephritis. Buried in that Revolutionary city, his body was exhumed in the early 20th century and removed, amidst great fanfare, to the chapel of the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis.

Research assistance by Kendra Lahue, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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