

THE STORY OF JOHN PAUL JONES

The name of John Paul Jones may mean little to the vast majority of people in the U.S. and Britain today but for a time in the late 18th. century he was a much celebrated and feared figure with a fame and reputation that spread throughout Europe and reached as far as Russia. Born in humble circumstances by the Solway coast in southern Scotland he rose to be an outstanding sea commander; personally acquainted with such famous characters as George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Louis XVI, the Marquis de Lafayette, Catherine the Great, Field Marshall Potemkin and many more besides. This CD aims to bring back some light to this forgotten, flawed yet brilliant individual and retell his extraordinary life story.

THE GAIRDNER'S SON

John Paul is born in 1747 and at age 13 goes to sea as a cabin boy. By the time he reaches 28 he is an experienced and successful master in the West Indian trade. In between times he has served on slave ships, navigated the Atlantic at age 19, and on one voyage been accused of causing the death of a crewman. His mercantile career, however, is cut short by the unfortunate killing of a local sailor who has attacked him in Tobago..

THE DISAPPEARANCE

John, in fear of his life, flees from Tobago and for a time remains in the West Indies, his whereabouts unknown.

VIRGINIA

There is mystery over exactly how John arrives in America. One theory* is that he assumes the identity of another Captain called Jones, is on a ship that is beached on the Potomac river, and is deserted by its crew. He certainly does go to visit his brother in Fredericksburg but finds he has died. With little money he then seeks out acquaintances and Masonic contacts in Virginia and North Carolina but failing to find work proceeds to Philadelphia virtually penniless.

LANDLORD

The Revolutionary War breaks out and our man (now John Paul Jones) joins the newly formed Continental Navy. Appointed Lieutenant of the 'Alfred' he sets about the preparation of the ship for sea with gusto. This includes the enlistment of a crew, no easy task since ordinary seaman will receive a larger share of prize money for captured enemy ships if they serve in privateers rather than navy vessels.

RIGGING THE SHIP/LA ROCHELLE

Jones is soon given a temporary Captain's commission and proves himself a nuisance and pest to the Royal Navy all along the U.S. Eastern Seaboard. He captures numerous merchant vessels and gives warships the slip. But he is also a nuisance to the Marine Committee in America with his constant criticism of other Captains and his demands for a permanent command. They pack him off to France to let Benjamin Franklin, the American Commissioner in Paris, put his mischief to good use.

THE PETIT COMMODORE

With Franklin's encouragement Jones makes plans to burn British ports in retaliation for American ones burned by the Royal Navy. He cooks up a scheme to attack his old home port of Whitehaven and sails from Brittany with his American crew.

DANIEL

The Whitehaven raid aborted, Jones in the 'Ranger' sails across the Solway to kidnap the Earl of Selkirk. The Earl is to be used as a bargaining tool for the release of American prisoners who, unlike

their British counterparts, have been thrown in common jails rather than held as prisoners of war. But the Earl is absent and the raid descends into farce.

ON THE LOOSE

The voyage of the 'Ranger' has achieved little militarily but the propaganda effect is enormous. Paul Jones has made his mark in a Britain badly shaken that her coastline has been violated. A second voyage in a fleet of four ships causes consternation as he brazenly sails round the British coast, and culminates in the episode that will seal his reputation: the defeat of the much more powerful British battleship the 'Serapis'. In the battle off the Yorkshire coast his own vessel, the 'Bonhomme Richard', is itself sunk but he takes over the stricken 'Serapis' and limps across the North Sea to the Dutch island of Texel evading the frantic searches of the Royal Navy.

HOLLAND

Paul Jones enjoys fame in Amsterdam as his crew make repairs and the British fleet lie in waiting off the coast. But he takes advantage of a storm to slip away and within hours he is clear of the straits of Dover and back to a hero's welcome in France.

PROVIDENCE BELLES/ ACROSS THE PISCATAQUA

Jones is the toast of the Paris court and is showered with honours and the attentions of female admirers, whose favours he has never been slow to indulge in. He is then ordered by Franklin to sail to America with much needed war supplies. In Philadelphia he is again treated as a hero. He is promised a new battleship and goes to Portsmouth, New Hampshire to oversee its construction. The war is going well for the Colonists. His star shines bright.

BECALMED

Fate intervenes, the promised ship is lost, the British capitulate at Yorktown and suddenly Paul Jones is unemployed. With the war over America disbands its navy so Jones persuades Congress to send him to France to negotiate for past monies due to him and his crews. He spends 3 weary years beset by delays and is repeatedly frustrated by evasive bureaucrats. Moreover the French are disinclined to offer him any posts in their navy. With no one at war he has become yesterday's warrior.

BALTIC CROSSING

Out of the blue Jones receives news of a commission. He visits Denmark to reclaim money from prize ships captured years before then travels to Sweden and charts a boat, ostensibly to take a cruise. Instead he pulls out a gun and orders the startled sailors to row him across the ice strewn Baltic Sea to Tallinn (then called Reval) in Estonia.

TSARINA, TSARINA

Jones has been summoned to St. Petersburg by the Empress Catherine to help expel the Turks from the Crimean Peninsula. His ego is swollen by elevation to Rear Admiral and he hastens to the Crimea under the impression he will lead the Russian fleet. But Marshal Potemkin, who is the overall commander of the Russian land and sea forces, has other admirals under him. There is no clear chain of command and Potemkin leaves them to their infighting. Though Jones is instrumental in the winning of the battle of Lemn Potemkin pointedly downplays his role. An indignant Paul Jones quits and leaves for St. Petersburg.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG MAN

In the mid 19th. century an aged Cossack is interviewed by a Russian officer and reminisces on his encounter with Paul Jones. He recounts the story of how he was chosen by Jones to row him among the Turkish fleet on the eve of the battle of Lemn in order to assess their strength. The Cossack, Ivak, testifies the Admiral was an inspiring leader who could be sweet like a vine but when necessary, be like a rock.

THE CHEVALIER

Paul Jones leaves Russia under a cloud. More or less dismissed by Empress Catherine on the advice of Potemkin his reputation is sullied by accusations that he has molested a 13 year old girl. He finds himself a social pariah in St. Petersburg. He wanders round Europe for months before settling in Paris, a city that is transformed by the tumultuous revolution. With few friends and suffering from ill health from his Russian travails he is likened by Thomas Carlyle to an 'empty wineskin' in his aimless existence. He dies alone in Paris in 1792.

John Paul Jones' grave and body (perfectly preserved in alcohol) are recovered in Paris in 1905. His remains are taken to Cherbourg, then across the Atlantic and given full naval escort from Nantucket to Chesapeake Bay and his final resting place in the chapel of the Naval Academy in Annapolis. There they reside today.

*this theory was propounded by Samuel Eliot Morison in his 1959 book *(A Sailor's Biography) John Paul Jones* which provides almost all of the background information for this CD.

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