



I Have Not Yet Begun to Fight: A Life of John Paul Jones

James A. Mackay

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No person in naval history, with the possible exception of Lord Nelson, has been the subject of so much romance or inspired so much heated controversy as has John Paul Jones. Such notable writers as Dumas, Melville, Carlyle, Kipling and Thackeray made him the subject of novels, poems and plays, yet from the cradle to grave and beyond the life of Jones (1747-92) was beset with mystery. From the rumours of illegitimacy to the search for his coffin more than a century after his death, the story of a gardener's son who became the founder of the United States Navy is an epic of spectacular exploits and outstanding achievements punctuated by disappointments and disasters that would have crushed a lesser man. The man of action, whose bravery and skill earned him a knighthood and a sword of honour from the French and a unique gold medal from Congress, was at the same time the most literate of America's sea captains, a one-time Shakespearian actor and a poet of considerable merit. He was also a notorious lothario who changed partners so often that the British, whom he defeated at sea, took their revenge by naming a derisive allusion to his womanising. Of all the exploits of this outstanding figure of the naval campaign of the American Revolution, none surpassed his encounter off Flamborough Head with HMS Serapis, a larger, faster and more powerfully armed ship than his own. The story of how Jones, by sheer guts, indomitable will and a refusal to admit the possibility of defeat, emerged victorious from the most desperate circumstances has been an inspiration to soldiers everywhere; and none more so that the US Navy itself in the dark days that followed Pearl Harbor, when the immortal words of that dour little Scotsman - 'I have not yet begun to fight' - were in the mind of every American seaman. In this, the first major biography in forty years, James Mackay presents an accurate and fully rounded picture of one of the greatest sailors of all time.

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