

REINTERMENT OF JOHN PAUL JONES

U.S. Naval Academy - April 24, 1906

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY CHARLES J. BONAPARTE

introduced the President as follows:

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN: We have met to honor the memory of that man who gave our Navy its earliest traditions of heroism and victory, The Commander in Chief of the Navy is of right the first to speak of such a man at such a time. You will hear the President.

On behalf of the American people I wish to thank our ancient ally, the great French nation, that proud and gallant nation to whose help we once owed it that John Paul Jones was able to win for the Stars and Stripes the victory that has given him deathless fame, and to whose courtesy we now owe it that the body of the long dead hero has been sent hither, and that to commemorate the reception of the illustrious dead a squadron of French war ships has come to our shores.

The annals of the French navy are filled with the names of brave and able seamen, each of whom courted death as a mistress when the honor of his flag was at stake; and among the figures of these brave men there loom the larger shapes of those who, like Tourville, Duquesne, and the Bailli de Suffren, won high renown as fleet admirals, inferior to none of any navy of their day in martial prowess.

In addition to welcoming the diplomatic and official representatives of France here present, let me also express my heartiest acknowledgments to our former ambassador to Paris, Gen. Horace Porter, to whose zealous devotion we particularly owe it that the body of John Paul Jones has been brought to our shores.

When the body was thus brought over the representatives of many different cities wrote to me, each asking that it should find its last resting place in his city. But I feel that the place of all others in which the memory of the dead hero will most surely be a living force is here in Annapolis, where year by year we turn out the midshipmen who are to officer in the future the Navy, among whose founders the dead man stands first. Moreover, the future naval officers, who live within these walls, will find in the career of the man whose life we this day celebrate, not merely a subject for admiration and respect, but an object lesson to be taken into their innermost hearts. Every officer in our Navy should know by heart the deeds of John Paul Jones. Every officer in our Navy should feel in each fiber of his being an eager desire to emulate the energy, the professional capacity, the indomitable determination and dauntless scorn of death which marked John Paul Jones above all his fellows.

The history of our Navy, like the history of our nation, extends over a period of only a century and a quarter; yet we already have many memories of pride to thrill us as we read and hear of what has been done by our fighting men of the sea, from Perry and Macdonough to Farragut and Dewey. These memories include brilliant victories, and also, now and then, defeats only less honorable than the victories themselves; but the only defeats to which this praise can be given are those where, against heavy odds, men have stood to the death in hopeless battle. It is well for every American officer to remember that while a surrender may or may not be defensible, the man who refuses to surrender need never make a defense. The one fact must always be explained; the other needs no explanation. Moreover, he who would win glory and honor for the nation and for himself, must not too closely count the odds; if he does, he will never see such a day as that when Cushing sank the Albemarle.

In his fight with the Serapis Jones's ship was so badly mauled that his opponent hailed him, saying "Has your ship struck?" to which Jones answered, "I have not yet begun to fight." The spirit which inspired that answer upbore the man who gave it and the crew who served under him through the fury of the battle, which finally ended in their triumph. It was the same spirit which marked the commanders of the Cumberland and the Congress, when they met an equally glorious though less fortunate fate. The Cumberland sank, her flag flying, and her guns firing with the decks awash, while, when summoned to surrender, Morris replied, "Never! I'll sink alongside!" and made his words good. Immediately after the Cumberland was sunk the Congress was attacked, and her commander, Lieut. Joe Smith, was killed. After fighting until she was helpless, and being unable to bring her guns to bear, the ship was surrendered; but when Smith's father, old Commodore Joe Smith, who was on duty at Washington, saw by the dispatches from Fort Monroe that the Congress had hoisted the white flag, he said quietly, "Then Joe's dead!" Surely no father could wish to feel a prouder certainty of his boy's behavior than the old commodore showed he possessed when he thus spoke; and no naval officer could hope to win a finer epitaph.

We have met to-day to do honor to the mighty dead. Remember that our words of admiration are but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals if we do not by steady preparation and by the cultivation of soul and mind and body fit ourselves so that in time of need we shall be prepared to emulate their deeds. Let every midshipman who passes through this institution remember, as he looks upon the tomb of John Paul Jones, that while no courage can atone for the lack of that efficiency which comes only through careful preparation in advance, through careful training of the men, and careful fitting out of the engines of war, yet that none of these things can avail unless in the moment of crisis the heart rises level with the crisis. The navy whose captains will not surrender is sure in the long run to whip the navy whose captains will surrender, unless the inequality of skill or force is prodigious. The courage which never yields can not take the place of the possession of good ships and good weapons and the ability skillfully to use these ships and these weapons.

I wish that our people as a whole, and especially those among us who occupy high legislative or administrative positions, would study the history of our nation, not merely for the purpose of national self gratification, but with the desire to learn the lessons that history teaches. Let the men who talk lightly about its being unnecessary for us now to have an army and navy adequate for the work of this nation in the world remember that such utterances are not merely foolish, for in their effects they may at any time be fraught with disaster and disgrace to the nation's honor as well as disadvantage to its interest. Let them take to heart some of the lessons which should be learned by the study of the War of 1812.

As a people we are too apt to remember only that some of our ships did well in that war. We had a few ships -- a very few ships -- and they did so well as to show the utter folly of not having enough of them. Thanks to our folly as a nation, thanks to the folly that found expression in the views of those at the seat of government, not a ship of any importance had been built within a dozen years before the war began, and the Navy was so small that, when once the war was on, our opponents were able to establish a close blockade throughout the length of our coast, so that not a ship could go from one port to another, and all traffic had to go by land. Our parsimony in not preparing an adequate navy (which would have prevented the war) cost in the end literally thousands of dollars for every one dollar we thus foolishly saved. After two years of that war an utterly inconsiderable British force of about four thousand men was landed here in the bay, defeated with ease a larger body of raw troops put against it, and took Washington.

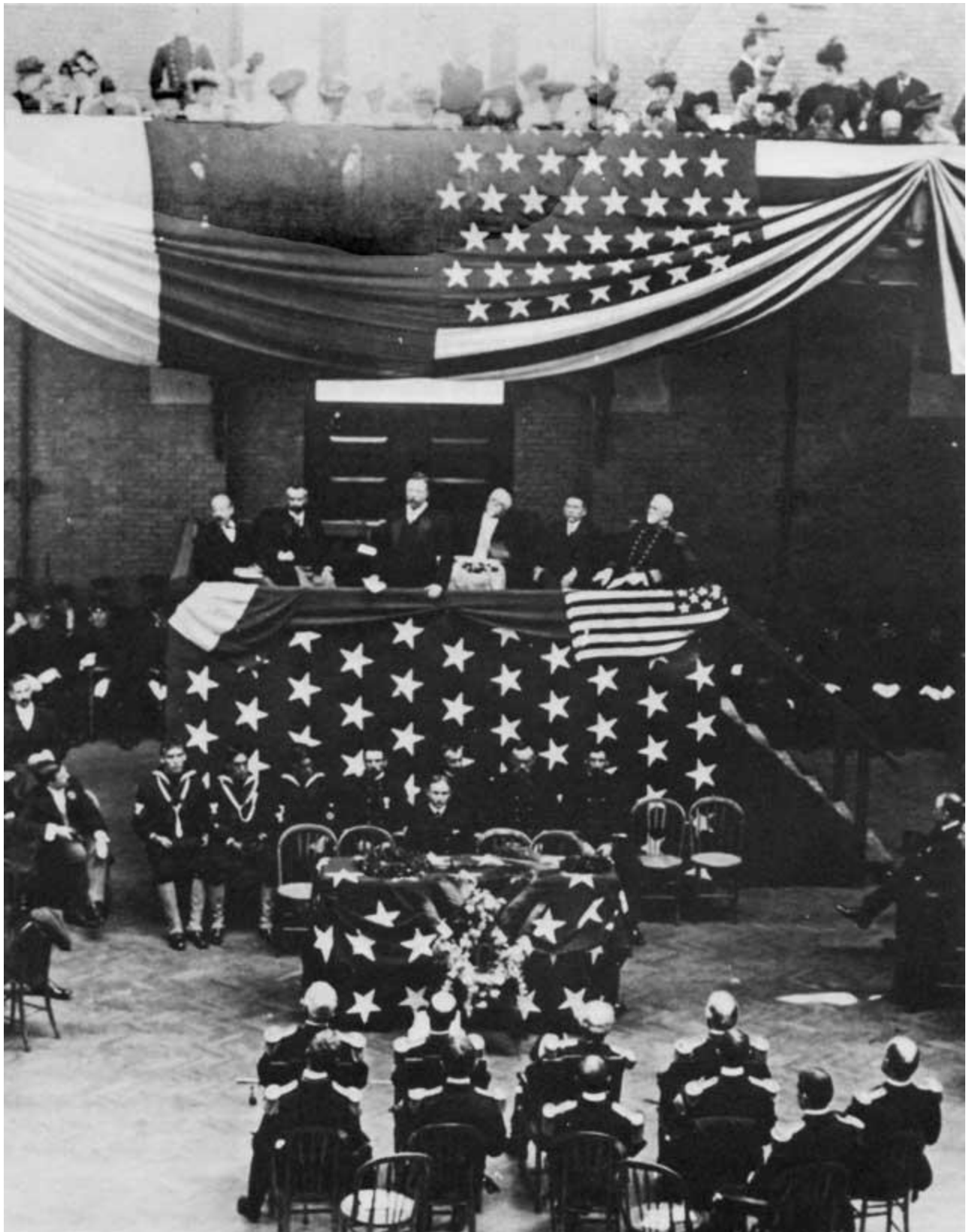
I am sorry to say that those of our countrymen who now speak of the deed usually confine themselves to denouncing the British for having burned certain buildings in Washington. They had better spare their breath. The sin of the invaders in burning the buildings is trivial compared with the sin of our own people in failing to make ready an adequate force to defeat the attempt. This nation was guilty of such shortsightedness, of such folly, of such lack of preparation that it was forced supinely to submit to the insult and was impotent to avenge it; and it was only the good fortune of having in Andrew Jackson a great natural soldier that prevented a repetition of the disaster at New Orleans. Let us remember our own shortcomings, and see to it that the men in public life to-day are not permitted to bring about a state of things by which we should in effect invite a repetition of such a humiliation.

We can afford as a people to differ on the ordinary party questions; but if we are both farsighted and patriotic we can not afford to differ on the all-important question of keeping the national defenses as they should be kept; of not alone keeping up, but of going on with building up of the United States Navy, and of keeping our small Army at least at its present size and making it the most efficient for its size that there is on the globe.

Remember, you here who are listening to me, that to applaud patriotic sentiments and to turn out to do honor to the dead heroes who by land or by sea won honor for our flag is only worth while if we are prepared to show that our energies do not exhaust themselves in words; if we are prepared to show that we intend to take to heart the lessons of the past and make things ready so that if ever, which heaven forbid, the need should arise, our fighting men on sea and ashore shall be able to rise to the standard established by their predecessors in our services of the past.

Those of you who are in public life have a moral right to be here at this celebration to-day only if you are prepared to do your part in building up the Navy of the present; for otherwise you have no right to claim lot or part in the glory and honor and renown of the Navy's past.

So much for what we in civil life outside of public office and within it are to do for you, and must do for you, in the Navy. Let you in the Navy remember that you must do your part. You will be worth less in war if you have not prepared yourselves for it in peace. You will be utterly unable to rise to the needs of the crisis if you have not by long years of steady and patient work fitted yourselves to get the last ounce of work out of every man, every gun, and every ship in the fleet; if you have not practiced steadily on the high seas until each ship can do its best, can show at its best, alone or in conjunction with others in fleet formation. Remember that no courage can ever atone for lack of that preparedness which makes the courage valuable; and yet if the courage is there, if the dauntless heart is there, its presence will sometimes make up for other shortcomings; while if with it are combined the other military qualities the fortunate owner becomes literally invincible.



President Theodore Roosevelt delivering the keynote address at the commemorative ceremony held in honor of John Paul Jones at the U.S. Naval Academy on 24 April 1906. Jones's flag draped casket stands before the speaker's stand.



John Paul Jones During the Battle
which illustrates the nineteenth-century
view of Jones as the heroic man of action



Crypt Beneath the Chapel of the United States Naval Academy

The crypt of John Paul Jones contains his massive black marble sarcophagus resting on the backs of four dolphins. Cases containing his captain's commission, reproductions of his medals, and other memorabilia line the walls, and a Marine sentry stands guard.

More info at: <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/johnpauljones.htm>