

BOOK REVIEWS

John Paul Jones' Memoir of the American Revolution Presented to King Louis XVI of France. Translated and edited by GERARD W. GAWALT. (Washington: Library of Congress, 1979. Pp. xix, 116. Acknowledgments, introduction, footnotes, glossary. \$6.50.)

John Paul Jones, when called upon by the commander of H.M.S. *Serapis* to surrender, uttered the memorable reply: "I have not yet begun to fight." Thus is the memory of one of America's heroes emblazoned in the mind of every schoolchild. Unfortunately for posterity, Jones said no such thing. His actual words were: "I'm not yet ready to surrender, but I am determined to make you ask for quarter" (p. 35).

This volume of Jones's memoirs, written in 1785 to impress Louis XVI of France, is a useful addition to libraries with extensive American Revolutionary or naval holdings. Jones at the time of writing was badly in need of employment and felt constrained to put his own accomplishments in the best possible light. Even making allowances for overstatements and omissions, nothing can dim the memory of the epic fight between the *Bonhomme Richard* and the *Serapis*. Seldom have battles been decided so clearly by the wills of the opposing commanders. Jones won not by the exercise of superior tactical ability, but because he refused to admit he was beaten long after any other captain would have admitted defeat.

As a strategist, too, Jones put forth a number of plans for the discomfiture of England (see pp. 13-14, 23, 50). As a result of his own successful harassment of the English coast, he suggested bringing a number of American seamen to France, utilizing them to man a force of frigates, and, reinforced by Irish levies in the French army, descend upon the English coast and, at the same time, threaten the incoming Baltic and Jamaica convoys. One does not doubt the feasibility of such an operation, but Jones was expecting far too much from interallied cooperation. This, and similar plans, never got off the ground.

Even at this distance, the casual reader can see that Jones's principal failing was his own monumental ego, and the consequent envy, hatred, and mistrust engendered thereby. He was, by his own admission, forever being undercut by bureaucrats, fellow officers, and members of Congress, a victim of petty jealousies and intrigues. Small

wonder that Louis XVI gave Jones's account little heed. He had enough troubles of his own at the time.

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Perry's Victory on Lake Erie: An Account of the Building of the Fleet in the Wilderness, the Decisive Battle at Put-In-Bay, and its Consequences. By DENYS W. KNOLL. (Erie, Pennsylvania: Erie County Historical Society, 1980. Pp. vi, 30. Acknowledgment, foreword, epilogue, bibliography. \$2.25.)

In this new publication of the Erie County Historical Society, Rear Admiral Denys W. Knoll provides a brief survey of the construction of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's fleet at Erie and its remarkable success in the pivotal Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813. The obstacles to building ships on what was then the frontier were many, including shortages of tools, rigging, oakum, pitch, iron, and manpower. Nevertheless, through the unstinting efforts of Perry, Captain Daniel Dobbins, and shipwrights Noah Brown and Ebenezer Crosby the Americans put together a small but balanced fleet in a remarkably short period of time. Under Perry, the tiny armada engaged a British fleet and defeated it near Put-in-Bay, Ohio, in the process securing control of the Great Lakes at a critical point in the War of 1812.

Knoll generally writes well, and his account is accurate insofar as the events relating to the fleet and the battle are concerned. When he moves away from these occurrences, however, to a larger view of the war and its implications, he runs into trouble. For example, it is not true that Perry's victory was "crucial to winning the War of 1812" (p. v), since the war was not won by the United States in any military sense; and tying the outcome of the war directly to the Monroe Doctrine (p. 28) vastly oversimplifies the complex origins of that document (enunciated in 1823, not 1817 as Knoll implies).

In spite of such deficiencies, Knoll and the Erie County Historical Society deserve accolades for a study of the battle and the events preceding it that is both readable and refreshingly concise.

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