

“AND WITHOUT A RESPECTABLE NAVY — ALAS AMERICA!”

THIS QUOTE BY JOHN PAUL JONES FROM 17 OCTOBER 1776 UNDERLINES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FLEDGLING NAVY. IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF THE REVOLUTION, THE MEMBERS OF THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS WHO SUPPORTED CREATING A NAVY UNDERSTOOD THAT AN AMERICAN NAVY COULD NEVER BE SUPERIOR TO THE BRITISH NAVY. BUT THESE “NAVALISTS” ARGUED THAT EVEN A SMALL FLEET OF SHIPS MIGHT PROVE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OVERALL VICTORY OR DEFEAT. BETWEEN 13 AND 30 OCTOBER 1775, A NEWLY ESTABLISHED NAVAL COMMITTEE OVERSAW THE CREATION OF THE NAVY. COMMITTEE MEMBER JOHN ADAMS WROTE THE FIRST NAVAL REGULATIONS WHICH, WITH A FEW CHANGES, WOULD REMAIN IN USE THROUGH THE FOLLOWING CENTURY. IT WAS THEN LEFT UP TO THOSE SERVING IN THIS NEW NAVY TO TAKE ON THE MOST POWERFUL ADVERSARY IN THE WESTERN WORLD — THE ROYAL NAVY. THIS SELECTION OF ART WORKS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND HIGHLIGHT THOSE TUMULTUOUS TIMES.



Born on 25 March 1745, Irish immigrant John Barry served in the Continental Navy during the American Revolutionary War and in the United States Navy during the Quasi-War. Many historians credit Barry as “The Father of the American Navy,” a title he shares with John Paul Jones and John Adams. Appointed as a captain in the Continental Navy on 7 December 1775, Barry was the first captain placed in command of an American warship commissioned for service under the Continental flag. After the Revolutionary War, he became the first commissioned American naval officer, at the rank of commodore, receiving his commission from President George Washington during 1797.



On 4 November 1775, the Naval Committee, with approval, from the Continental Congress, purchased a merchant ship named *Black Prince*. The vessel was obtained from John Barry, the first American naval officer. The ship was renamed *Alfred* and reconfigured to carry up to 30 cannon, firing from gun ports cut into the sides of the hull. For the weaponry, the three-masted, square-rigged ship had its interior hull considerably strengthened. *Alfred* was placed into commission on 3 December 1775.

On that date, Lt. John Paul Jones raised the Grand Union Flag, which was the first official American national flag and is depicted in this painting. *Alfred* participated in the raid on Nassau and the Battle of Block Island. However, the Royal Navy captured her in 1778 and she became HMS *Alfred*. Sold in 1782, she then became a merchantman, plying the trade routes between London and Jamaica. This oil painting on board was done in 1974 by William Nowland Van Powell.