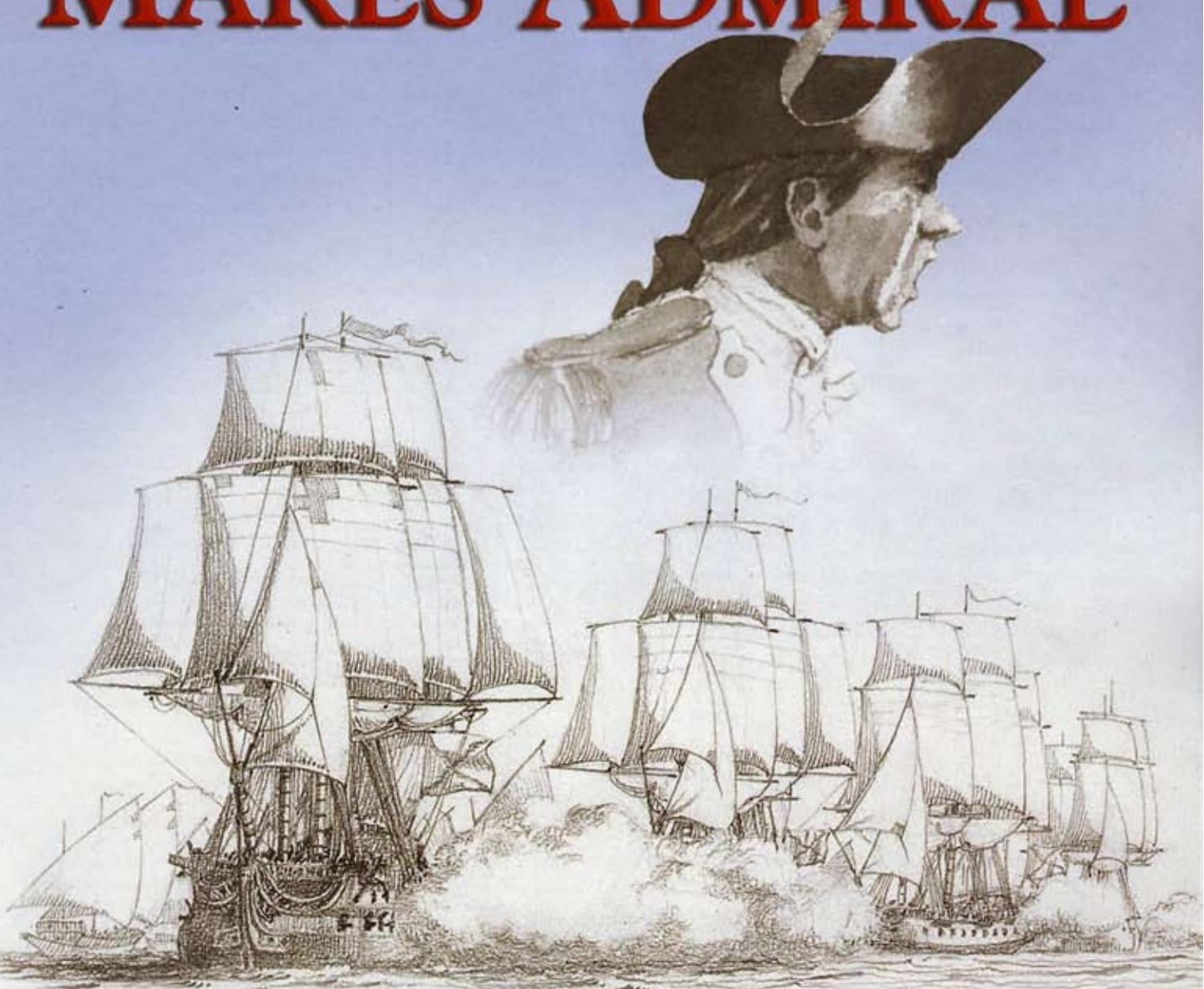
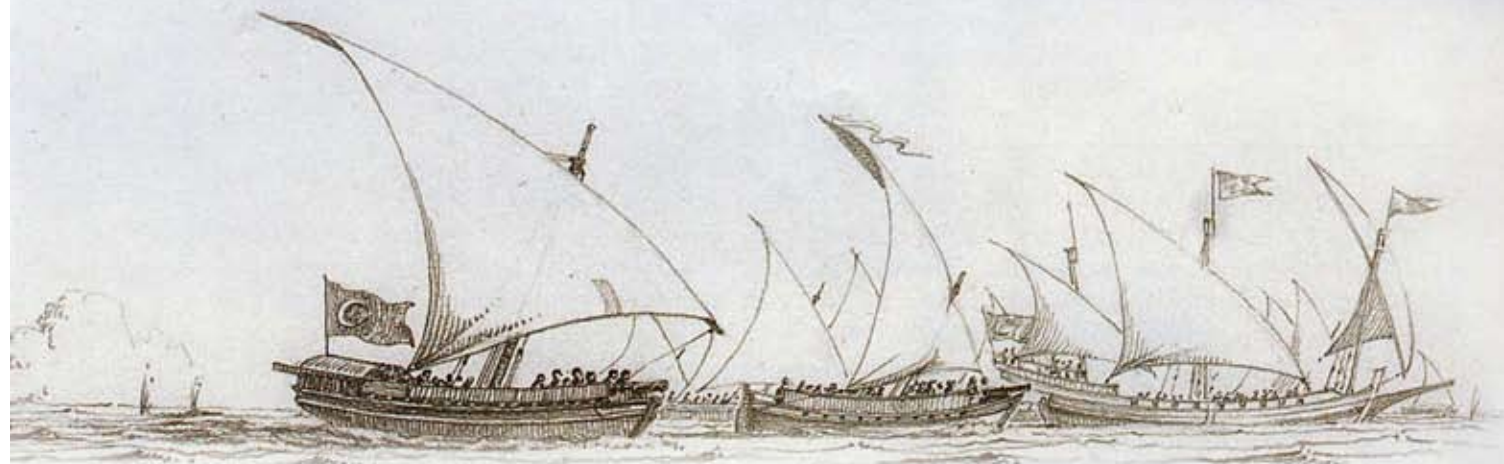


# JOHN PAUL JONES MAKES ADMIRAL



*Flagship Vladimir, John Paul Jones, at the Bannan* G

**But not in the United States. Jones became a rear admiral in the Russian Navy in 1788, flying his flag in the *Vladimir* as he defeated the Turks in an obscure sound at a northern gateway to the Black Sea. In the end, political chicanery determined who would receive credit for the victory.**



John Paul Jones' achievements in the Revolutionary War made him a celebrity in Paris and a hero in America. But sadly, the only command in the Continental Navy to follow his astonishing accomplishments was deeply disappointing. In June 1782, he was appointed to take command of the 74-gun *America*, which was under construction in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. As he looked forward to taking the new country's first ship of the line to sea, Jones also had reason to believe he would become its first admiral.

The war hero's high hopes were dashed in September 1782, however, when Congress decided to give the new ship to France so she could replace *Le Magnifique*, which had been wrecked entering Boston Harbor. And as the American Revolution was winding down and moving toward the Treaty of Paris of 1783, the Continental Navy was declining rapidly. Lacking other prospects, in November that year Jones accepted an assignment in Europe. His mission was to secure prize money due him and his former crew members. He returned to the United States briefly in 1787, but by the end of that year, he was back in Europe on a similar mission.

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#### *A New Career Door Opens*

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At the time Jones returned to Europe, Catherine the Great of Russia was embroiled in the Second Russo-Turkish War, which was fueled by her ambition for expansion southward. The empress faced a sticking point where the estuaries of the Dnieper and Bug rivers combined in a sound called the Liman. At Ochakov, where the Liman entered the Black Sea, the Ottoman Empire had established a fort, effectively checking Russian access to the Black Sea from the two rivers and clouding Catherine's view to the south.

The petty Russian noble and field marshal, Prince Grigory Alexandrovich Potemkin, who was Catherine's adviser and lover, had attempted to take the fort but failed. The empress was looking for a proven naval officer who could solve her problem, and Jones was available. Catherine's assessment of him was revealing: "He will get to Constantinople."<sup>1</sup>

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#### *Recruiting an Admiral*

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In early 1788, the Russian ambassador in Paris, Baron Johan Matias, pursued the question of recruiting Jones for Catherine's navy with Thomas Jefferson. A friend and supporter of Jones', Jefferson encouraged the idea, and Jones was interested.

It was not unusual at the time for unemployed naval officers to serve in navies other than their own. Nevertheless, Jones had misgivings. In April 1788 he wrote to Jefferson, with a tinge of guilt showing between the lines: "I have

not forsaken the country that has had many . . . proofs of my steady affection; and I can never renounce the glorious title of a citizen of the United States."<sup>2</sup> He went on: "I am called to immediate practice; where I must command in chief, conduct the most difficult operations, be my own preceptor, and instruct others." Jones was anticipating an opportunity to move on to the highest operational level of his profession—and to flag rank.

Jones arrived at St. Petersburg that same month. Notwithstanding his warm welcome there, his appointment by Catherine triggered an undercurrent at court that portended future problems. A patronizing comment in a letter to Austrian Emperor Joseph II from the Prince de Ligne, a confidant of Potemkin's, was indicative: "He will arrive here next week; an excellent acquisition, so they say. We shall see; but I think him only a corsair."<sup>3</sup>

Catherine left it to Potemkin to determine how Jones would be employed, and the prince, who had received the naval officer with civility, placed him in command of the fleet in the Liman. Jones quickly discovered that his new command was dangerously weakened by a split in authority.

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#### *A Bad Beginning*

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Among Jones' first command problems was another Russian rear admiral, the German-French Prince of Nassau-Siegen. Nassau-Siegen commanded the small craft—referred to as the flotilla—in the Russian naval force at the Liman. He was an army officer and military adventurer who looked not to Jones but to his confidant, Potemkin, for his orders.

A second problem was with a Russian rear admiral, Count Nicholas Mordvinov, the British-trained commander of the naval base at Kherson, a major support facility on the lower Dnieper for Jones' new command. Mordvinov resented Jones' appointment and refused to provide the operational briefing for him that Potemkin had ordered.

Finally, when Jones arrived aboard his flagship, the Russian *Vladimir*, he had yet another confrontation with a disgruntled officer. The *Vladimir*'s Greek captain, Brigadier Panaiotti Alexiano, had anticipated receiving the command that Potemkin had assigned Jones, and he showed his anger by threatening to resign and take the ship's crew with him.

It is clear, however, that Jones took a positive approach to the difficult circumstances of his assignment. That approach helped him initially. For example, Alexiano and the crew of *Vladimir* stayed.

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#### *The Tactical Situation*

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The Liman estuary extended from a fleet anchorage where the Dnieper River emptied into it at its eastern

end to the opening to the Black Sea, 30 miles to the west; the Turkish fort at Ochakov dominated the narrow exit to the sea there. A Russian installation called Fort Kinburn—commanded by General Alexander Suvorov—stood on the south shore of the Liman, opposite the Turkish fort at Ochakov. One of the first and most important joint army-navy actions of the campaign was the installation of two Russian gun batteries on a sand spit adjacent to Fort Kinburn, a suggestion made by Jones and agreed to by Suvorov.

The Liman was approximately eight miles across at its widest points, and it narrowed to approximately two miles at some places. The average depth was 18 feet. About four miles to the east of Ochakov was a narrow point where

Jones would deploy his fleet for the battle. A short distance still farther to the east was the mouth of the Bug River, which Potemkin would have to cross to establish a base he needed near Ochakov.

The opposing naval forces had two basic elements. Each side had a fleet of deep-draft sailing vessels, including three-masted ships of the line and frigates, some two-masted brigs, and other smaller ships. Jones' flagship *Vladimir*, designed to mount 66 guns, actually carried only 24, reducing her—in terms of firepower—to the equivalent of a small frigate. He also commanded eight ships generously classified as frigates and some smaller ships. It was a nondescript fleet by the standards of major naval powers at the time, such

as Britain, France, and Spain. The second element of each force was a flotilla of scores of smaller, shallow-draft, and mostly oared boats. Although precise numbers of the Turkish force are difficult to discern from records, apparently the Turks had more deep-draft ships, and the Russians had a larger shallow-draft flotilla.<sup>4</sup>

Jones chose to fight his ships from a defensive position at anchor. He deployed them across the narrow point of the Liman, just to the west of the mouth of the Bug River, and he convinced Nassau-Siegen to place the Russian flotilla in the same position. In that narrow area, the superior Russian flotilla could be employed to best advantage and negate the superior numbers of the Turkish fleet. In addition, in the position Jones chose he was able to prevent the Turkish forces from taking control of the lower Bug River.

#### Round One

In the early morning of 17 June, Hassan el Ghazi, the experienced Turkish admiral often referred to as Captain Pasha, advanced his flotilla past Ochakov and into the Liman; the first phase of the battle had begun. Initially, Nassau-Siegen attempted to get elements of his flotilla behind the Turkish units in the estuary, but he was driven back. Hassan el Ghazi then made a major attack on the morning of 18 June with most of his flotilla and at least ten ships from his fleet. He first attacked the right flank of



COURTESY OF THE ARTS AND LETTERS



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The bane of Jones' Russian existence was Prince Grigory Alexandrovich Potemkin (above right), adviser and lover of Catherine the Great (above), referred to by one historian as at once "cagey" and "fat." Potemkin's falsified version of the Battle of the Liman discredited Jones and won the prince professional and financial rewards from Catherine.

the Russian position, but Jones anticipated the thrust and adjusted his line from a cutter being rowed through the Russian force during the action.

With the roar of cannon fire and the smoke of battle swirling around him in the cutter, Jones presented an unusual picture of a fleet commander. But his unconventional command technique was the kind of pragmatic adjustment to difficult circumstances that had marked the tactics of Jones and his fellow Continental Navy captains during the American Revolution.

With a fortuitous wind shift, Jones was able to move units of his left flank forward, putting the Turks in a deadly crossfire. Hassan el Ghazi realized he was in the jaws of a trap, and he withdrew after losing three boats. Round one went to Jones and the Russians.

Following the action, Jones reported to Potemkin, making an effort to spread the credit:

At eight o'clock, when the Prince of Nassau and I were in a Cutter, looking over our position and reconnoitering a little closer to our enemy, their Flotilla began to fire on us very vigorously. At the same time the first division of their Flotilla advanced along Shore and attacked our reserve, stationed between our ships and the Coast. We took their fire for some time without response, but, seeing the engagement was growing serious, I did my best to help the Prince make the necessary manoeuvres. Then I hurried along the line to bring up all the Batteries and other boats of the Flotilla. . . . The Turks, on their part, had brought up the second division of their Flotilla, and I hoped for some time that this would be a decisive battle; but the arrival of our Second division on the Battle-line put the Turks to rout and, with the wind against Us, we pursued them as far as their Squadron. . . . The Prince showed great coolness and intelligence . . . Mr. Alexiano came in another Cutter and helped us preserve good Order. . . . I was greatly pleased by the conduct of the officers; they were brave and orderly; and I do not think the Captain Pasha, who commanded in person, will eat his dinner with pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

## Round Two

On 27 June, Hassan el Ghazi attacked again, and the battle's second phase began. With a favorable southwest wind, "Captain Pasha" swept into the Liman from the Black Sea, with trumpets blaring, cymbals clanging, and shouts for Allah's blessing reverberating throughout his fleet. The Russian forces were positioned as they had been in the first phase of the battle. At about 1400 and roughly a mile from the Russian force, Hassan el Ghazi ran aground, and the Turkish ships anchored.

Nassau-Siegen wanted to attack immediately, but Jones convinced him to hold his position. Jones' decision was right, since the wind went to the northwest, making it difficult for a Russian attack to be sustained, and that evening Jones took advantage of the lull to reconnoiter in a very small boat rowed by a single Cossack sailor named Ivak. According to the Cossack, as he and Jones moved among the anchored Turkish fleet, Jones chalked a message on the stern of one of the ships: "To be burned. Paul Jones."

At about 0200 on the 28th, the Turkish flagship was freed, and two hours later a general melee began. Again, the Turkish flagship ran aground, this time along with the ship of the Turkish second in command. Nassau-Siegen and



his entire flotilla attacked the stranded ships and burned them to the waterline, passing up an opportunity to take two valuable prizes.

Nassau-Siegen's concentration on the two grounded Turkish ships left Jones' fleet exposed to attack from the enemy flotilla, and a Russian frigate was sunk. Jones eventually succeeded in getting one of the prince's subordinates to gather enough of the Russian flotilla to join his fleet and drive the Turks back to the entrance of the Liman. There, the batteries Jones and General Suvorov had established came to bear and drove nine of Hassan el Ghazi's ships aground. On the morning of the 29th, Suvorov requested that Jones destroy the grounded vessels, but Nassau-Siegen insisted that was a job for his flotilla. Ultimately, the prince's flotilla burned seven and captured two enemy ships, once again missing a chance to seize many valuable prizes.

During the two days of the second phase of the battle, the Turks lost ten ships and five boats. Casualties included 3,000 Turks killed and 1,673 Turkish prisoners taken. Jones and the Russians lost one ship, with 67 wounded and 18 killed. The second and final round, too, had gone to Jones and the Russians, this time by a wide margin.

#### Immediate Aftermath

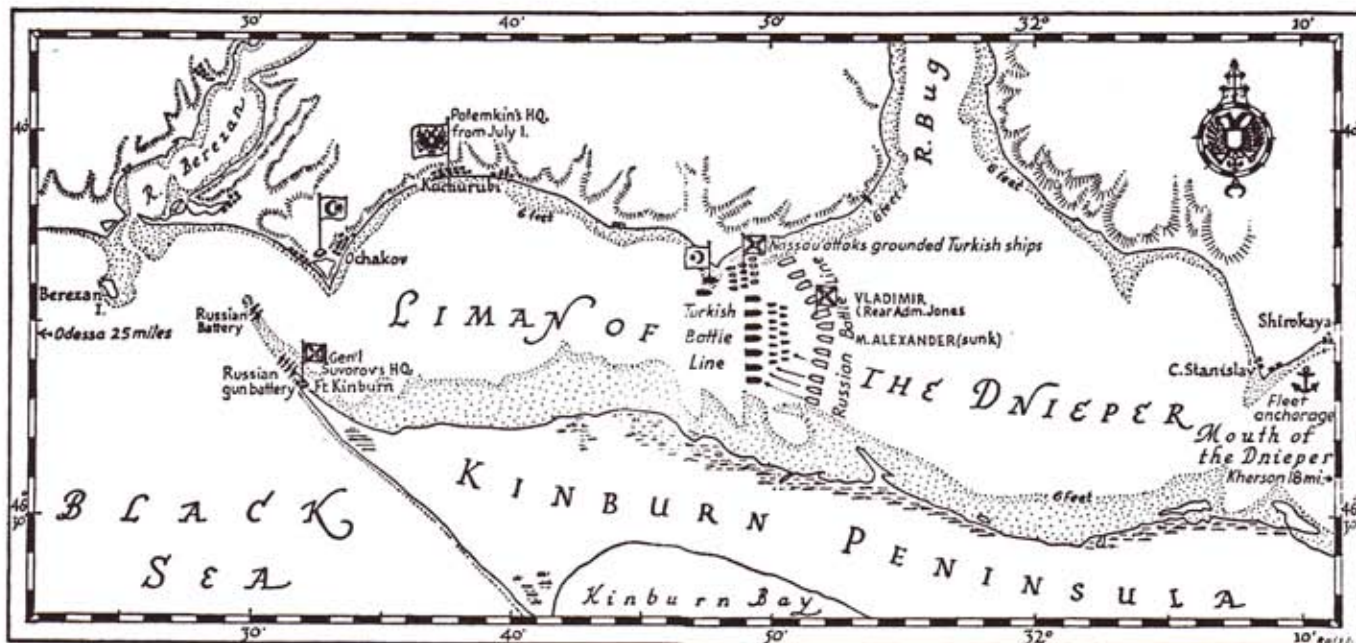
As a result of Jones' actions, the Turkish effort to control the Liman failed, and Potemkin eventually was able

to capture Fort Ochakov. The initial strategic objectives for Jones' assignment from Catherine were met. Evidence that the admiral never lost sight of the strategic basis of his assignment in the Liman is clear. On 24 June, for example, he had written to Nassau-Siegen, who wanted to advance the position of the Russian flotilla after the first phase of the combat: "We are in a good position here to protect the disembarkation of the Artillery destined for the siege of Ochakov, an Objective to Us more important than the benefits you seek in advancing three Versts [approximately two miles]—Benefits which We do not look upon from the same point of view."<sup>6</sup>

Jones was pointing out the importance of seeing the broad strategic picture, and his patience in working around the flaws of a divided command demonstrated that he had the skill and temperament to win when in command of a fleet.

#### Long-Term Results

After the Battle of the Liman, Jones continued to work tirelessly and courageously in the siege of Ochakov. Nassau-Siegen was detached at the end of July to inspect the Russian base at Sevastopol and returned in early August as a vice admiral. Then, Potemkin offered Jones command of the badly organized Sevastopol Fleet. Jones declined the offer, and naval operations in the Liman deteriorated because of contrary weather, along with mistimed orders



FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION, WITH SPECIAL PERMISSION OF RAISZ LANDFORM MAPS

The Liman is a sound at the mouth of the Dnieper and Bug rivers. The battle map reproduced here shows the situation at 0400 on 27 June 1788, when the second Battle of the Liman began. Jones positioned his forces to take full advantage of the restricted maneuvering room and shallow water. Turkish ships are solid black, and Russian ships are outlined.

and increasing micromanagement by Potemkin. Finally, on 29 October, Potemkin sent a highly offensive order to Jones:

I request your excellency, the captain pacha having actually a greater number of vessels, to hold yourself in readiness to receive him courageously, and drive him back. I require that this be done without the loss of time; if not, you will be made answerable for every neglect.<sup>7</sup>

Jones had had enough. His long and detailed response to the order was wrapped around a blunt rebuke:

But as I come hither neither as an adventurer nor a charlatan to repair a broken fortune, I hope in future to experience no humiliation and soon find myself in the situation which was promised to me, when I was invited to enter into the marine of the empress.<sup>8</sup>

With that point-blank admonishment of his commander in chief, Jones had gone too far. From the prince's point of view, Jones would have to be discredited and eliminated, and Potemkin and Nassau-Siegen were well suited by nature and court experience for that mission.

In September 1788, Jones' friend, Chevalier Louis Littlepage, wrote a goodbye note to him. Littlepage, who had just resigned his position under Nassau-Siegen, was among those who had originally urged Jones to accept the invitation to serve in the Russian Navy. By the time he was writing to Jones, however, he was fed up with Nassau-Siegen's posturing and inept leadership: "Adieu, my dear admiral, take care of yourself, and be cautious in whom you trust" he advised. "Remember you have to sustain here a political as well as military character."<sup>9</sup>

As Littlepage intimated, Jones did indeed have much to worry about. Potemkin and Nassau-Siegen immediately began claiming credit for the victories at the Liman, which convinced Catherine to turn against Jones. The military and financial rewards Catherine conferred on Potemkin and Nassau-Siegen gave royal credibility to their version of the battle.

In contrast to Potemkin's and Nassau-Siegen's claims, Jones' Russian captains authenticated his leading role at the Liman by officially endorsing his written description of the battle. The fact that those captains were combatants in the actual events adds credence to their testimony.

Arguably the biggest loser in the political infighting led by Potemkin and Nassau-Siegen was Catherine. The Turkish hold on Ochakov had been broken; the entrance to the Black Sea and the sea route to Constantinople were open. With a strong naval force, Jones could have real-

ized Catherine's prediction when she said: "He will get to Constantinople." When Catherine turned on Jones, what might have been Russia's last best hope for sea access to the Mediterranean was gone.

### *The Final Chapter*

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In October, Potemkin relieved Jones in the Liman, claiming Catherine had an assignment for him in her Baltic Fleet. Jones departed on 9 November, and after three days in an open boat, he came down with pneumonia. The aftermath of the illness carried over for the balance of his life.

Once back in St. Petersburg in December, Jones began writing proposals for a much-needed reorganization of the Russian Navy, and he even wrote a recommendation for a commercial treaty between Russia and the United States. He also penned his *Narrative of the Campaign of the Liman*. Catherine was not listening, however, and to confirm her growing animosity toward Jones, she promoted, of all people, Nassau-Siegen to command her Baltic Fleet. Eventually, efforts to discredit Jones sank to a sordid level with what proved a false accusation against him for a sexual assault of a young woman. The political process was complete; the innocent had been punished and the guilty rewarded.

In September 1789, Jones left St. Petersburg for Warsaw. The most positive thing he took away from his service in Catherine's navy was his memory of the loyalty and combat performance of his Russian captains. That and the knowledge of his success as a fleet commander who won in combat would have to be enough. ⚓

<sup>1</sup>F. A. Golder, *John Paul Jones in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927), 38.

<sup>2</sup>Robert C. Sands, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones, Including His Narrative of the Campaign of the Liman* (New York: A. Chandler, 1830), 390.

<sup>3</sup>Prince de Ligne, trans. By Katherine P. Wormeley, *Memoirs, Letters, and Miscellaneous Papers* (Boston, 1899), 70.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Elliot Morison, *John Paul Jones—A Sailor's Biography* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), 367-69.

<sup>5</sup>Golder, *John Paul Jones in Russia*, 162-63.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>7</sup>Sands, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones, Including his Narrative of the Campaign of the Liman*, 451.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 454

<sup>9</sup>Morison, *John Paul Jones—A Sailor's Biography*, 381-82.

Rear Admiral Callo's works include the Naval Institute Press books *Nelson in the Caribbean: The Hero Emerges, 1784-1787* (2003) *Nelson Speaks: Admiral Lord Nelson in his own Words* (2001), and the soon to be released *John Paul Jones: America's First Sea Warrior*. He also wrote *Legacy of Leadership: Lessons from Admiral Lord Nelson* (Central Point, OR: Hellgate Press, 1999) and co-wrote *Who's Who in Naval History: From 1550 the Present* (Abingdon, Oxford, England: Routledge, 2004).