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WILLIAM JONES - SECRETARY OF THE NAVY, 1813-1814  
MASTER OF WARTIME PLANNING AND REALISTIC STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING

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An Essay

Submitted to

The Faculty of the

United States Naval War College

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Graduate Certificate in Maritime History

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by

Andrew G. Wilson, DC – US Naval Criminal Investigative Service

May 16, 2022

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MASTER OF WARTIME PLANNING AND REALISTIC STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING

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### ABSTRACT

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Appointed Secretary of the Navy in January of 1813, William Jones of Pennsylvania led the nation's naval service for two critical years against the world's largest and most professional naval force – Britain's Royal Navy. In doing so he provided experienced and practical strategic guidance to a navy laden with able, aggressive, and proud captains aboard well-founded vessels, creating momentary doubt even within the Royal Navy. Jones brought reform and structure, fostered technological innovation, and provided the Navy with a firm administrative foundation and culture upon which to build the U.S. Navy of the future. William Jones represents the embodiment of the calm, efficient, and professional leadership required during times of extreme tension and existential danger for a military service, in this case, the United States Navy.

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***“It follows then as certain as that night succeeds the day, that without a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it, everything honorable and glorious.”***

President George Washington, 15 November 1781, to Marquis de Lafayette.<sup>1</sup>

When the United States declared war on Great Britain in the summer of 1812, the British Royal Navy had six ships deployed to the North American station, to include a 74 gun ship-of-the-line, and could draw upon other vessels stationed in Caribbean or European waters.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the young republic of the United States possessed a navy consisting of only seventeen ships, none of which was a ship-of-the-line.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the United States by no means had the underpinnings of naval power required to effectively wage war against the greatest naval power on the globe in 1812. The United States Navy at this time had no dry dock, cured timber for ship construction was limited, and the best timber had to come from the southern states (particularly Georgia) via the sea, and therefore at continual risk of interdiction by the Royal Navy’s ships patrolling the nation’s coasts.<sup>4</sup> Despite this great naval imbalance, the upstart United States

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<sup>1</sup> *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. vol.23. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937): 341, <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/heritage/famous-navy-quotations.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Figures regarding the number of Royal Navy ships on station at the outbreak of the war vary, depending upon how they are counted, and what some writers include under the heading of “North American station” etc. For more on the issue of ship numbers see Stephen Budiansky, “Giant Killer in the War of 1812,” *Military History Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2009), 50; In fact, as noted by Nathan Miller, Britain had 600+ naval vessels, with 250 of those being ships of the line and/or frigates; *Broadsides: The Age of Fighting Sail, 1775-1815* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.), 335.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Black, *Naval Power: A History of Warfare and the Sea from 1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 90. It is worth noting that this “fleet” of ships consisted of a mixture of vessels ranging from sloops & brigs to frigates, but most crucially, in terms of contesting the maritime commons against the Royal Navy, included no 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> rate ships (50+ guns and up).

<sup>4</sup> At the outbreak of war, the U.S. Navy had only one fully operational “navy yard,” the Washington Navy Yard. See Nathan Miller, *Broadsides: The Age of Fighting Sail, 1775-1815* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000), 335.

Navy managed to cover itself with glory in the first year of the war at sea against the Royal Navy.

In early August the USS *Essex* defeated HMS *Alert* in the Atlantic, and later that same month the USS *Constitution* (“Old Ironsides”) defeated the British frigate HMS *Guerriere* off the coast of Nova Scotia. Success continued for the U.S. when in October the sloop-of-war USS *Wasp* met and defeated the British brig-sloop HMS *Frolic*, only to be followed later in the month with the defeat of the HMS *Macedonian* by the USS *United States* off of Madeira. Finally, to round out a successful year at sea, in December of 1812 the USS *Constitution* encountered the HMS *Java* and defeated her off the coast of Brazil. This series of U.S. naval victories came as a shock to the Royal Navy, as no British vessel had struck its colors “in nearly a decade,” and these actions forced the British admiralty to alter sailing orders to its captains, admonishing them to avoid single ship engagements with the United States’ “super-frigates.”<sup>5</sup>

Such a string of victories would not last in the face of the growing Royal Navy presence off the shores of the United States, especially as additional continental resources were freed up due to British successes associated with the War of the Sixth Coalition. By the winter of 1812-1813, the news of the war for the United States was decidedly less positive, especially as the U.S. Army’s campaign against British forces in Canada was not playing out as hoped. The lack of military success against Canada became a key issue in late 1812 and the need for improved military guidance to advise and support President Madison in the prosecution of the war became

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<sup>5</sup> The U.S. frigates noted here (*Constitution*, *United States*, and *Essex*) were considered by many contemporaries and later historians alike to be amongst the finest vessels of the type then in service. In fact, one historian (Jeremy Black) even referred to them as “the most powerful frigates of the age” (Black, *Naval Power*, 90); Jeremy Black also comments on Royal Navy warnings to its vessels about the need to avoid the American frigates in *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 130. See James C. Bradford, *America, Sea Power, and the World* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 48-49.

critical. For the Navy Department, this meant the replacement of Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton with William Jones. The decision to replace the secretary was made easier by the fact that Hamilton, under increasing pressure to manage the war at sea, had no real naval or maritime background from which to draw upon (unlike Jones), and had likely been originally appointed for political vice professional qualifications.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, word of excessive drinking on his part did not help his cause.<sup>7</sup>

The appointment of William Jones as Secretary of the Navy in January of 1813 represents a turning point in both effective management and direction of the U.S. Navy during the war, as well as serving as an institutional benchmark for the professionalization, organization, and development of the strategic force that became the United States Navy of today. Simply put, the appointment of Jones as head of the Navy proved to be a pivotal decision by President Madison, a decision that would ensure the Navy was designed, led, and militarily impactful to a level that allowed the U.S. to secure a modicum of success against a vastly superior adversary. Jones' influence on more economical ship designs and build timelines, strategic deployment of vessels, and focused long-term martialing of naval-oriented supplies and the administrative reforms to support such changes, led to a much more decisive impact on the war and future of the U.S. Navy. In essence, the administrative influence and strategic direction provided by William Jones placed the U.S. Navy – and its military potential and positive martial reputation – squarely in the collective minds of both Congress and the American people via victories. The firm and able

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<sup>6</sup> See McCranie, Kevin D. "Waging Protracted Naval War: The Strategic Leadership of Secretary of the U.S. Navy William Jones in the War of 1812." *The Northern Mariner/le marin du nord*. 21 (April 2011), 144.

<sup>7</sup> Edward K. Eckert, *The Navy Department in the War of 1812* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1973), 15. According to William Dudley, the rumors of excessive drinking were supplemented by reports of personal financial difficulties. In addition, charges of possible mismanagement by members of Congress were also apparently circulating, all of which made it somewhat easier for Madison to select a secretary more to his liking. See Dudley's *Inside the U.S. Navy of 1812-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 39.

leadership of Secretary Jones underpinned the Navy's growing confidence, despite it being completely outclassed on paper and at sea by the Royal Navy and all the infrastructure that kept Britannia's fleets at sea. As summarized by one writer, Jones was the "unifying and coordinating force which was perhaps the decisive weight in bringing to the Navy the considerable success it won" in the War of 1812.<sup>8</sup>

Following the recent bicentennial celebrations of the war, there now exists an expansive collection of work detailing and debating the naval war of 1812.<sup>9</sup> And while professional and amateur scholars alike continue to debate who really "won" the naval conflict (vice the overall war), there is very little to be found extolling the impact that William Jones had on the outcome of the conflict. In fact, arguably two of the most well-known foundational works on the naval struggle against Britain, James Fenimore Coopers' *History of the Navy of the United States of America* (1848) and Theodore Roosevelt's *Naval War of 1812* (1882) fail to mention William Jones.<sup>10</sup> However, the few books and articles that are available regarding Jones do allow for a survey of some key issues worth further consideration.

Among the first publications to offer serious consideration of the role in the war played by William Jones was an article written in 1906 by Charles Paullin.<sup>11</sup> Paullin, a professional

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth L. Brown, "Mr. Madison's Secretary of Navy," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* Vol. 73, No. 8 (August 1947), 967.

<sup>9</sup> A small sample of such recent scholarship on the naval war of 1812 include Andrew Lambert's *The Challenge: Britain Against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2012); *Utmost Gallantry: The U.S. and Royal Navies at Sea in the War of 1812* by Kevin D. McCranie (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011); *1812: The Navy's War* by George C. Daughan (New York: Basic Books, 2011); and Stephen Budiansky's *Perilous Fight: America's Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001); Theodore Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812 or the History of the United States Navy During the Last War with Great Britain to Which is Appended an Account of the Battle of New Orleans* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Paullin, "Naval Administration Under Secretaries of the Navy Smith, Hamilton, and Jones, 1801-1814," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* Vol. XXXII, (1906), 1289-1328.

naval historian, provides a sweeping survey of the myriad issues involved in running a navy, even a small fleet such as that possessed by the fledgling republic. Paullin covers naval infrastructure, annual expenses for various stores and provisions for the fleet, some of the political wrangling underpinning all of these themes, as well as a brief synopsis of Jefferson's gunboat navy.<sup>12</sup> What Paullin does make abundantly clear are the obstacles, which required Jones' attention upon entering office.

In the winter of 1811-1812 on the eve of the war with Great Britain, the Navy Department was unprepared in every essential means, instrument, and material of naval warfare. It had no dry docks. It had few ships. With the exception of the naval establishment at Washington, the navy-yards were in a state of neglect and decay. The navy had few conveniences for building, repairing, and laying up ships.<sup>13</sup>

By January of 1813 when Jones took over the navy secretariat, little had changed from the dire situation described so succinctly by Paullin.

Later attempts to detail the history of the department and Secretary Jones were made beginning in 1973 with the publication of Edward Eckert's brief work *The Navy Department in the War of 1812*.<sup>14</sup> Describing Jones as "a person unconcerned with theoretical problems and almost totally lacking in intellectual penetration," Eckert fails to grasp that in the midst of a war against the world's naval superpower, theoretical interests and deep intellectual mental debates may not have been what the nation actually needed in such circumstances.<sup>15</sup> What was needed was clear, focused direction of the men and limited resources available to prosecute the war at

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 1303. Paullin refers to Jefferson's gunboat navy labeling it one of "the most useless" naval increases made.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 1317.

<sup>14</sup> Edward K. Eckert, *The Navy Department in the War of 1812* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1973). Eckert's limited monograph (only seventy-seven pages) draws upon Jones' personal papers, as well as his official correspondence while in office.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 74. Eckert does credit Jones with administrative and practical decision making qualities, but does so in a tone of resigned acknowledgement rather than a true appreciation for wartime leadership requirements. One point made in his first chapter though is correct: "Historians of this period have almost entirely ignored the organization and administration of the navy. No serious studies have been published on the influence of the secretary of the navy, a cabinet-level officer, in a time of national emergency." See Eckert, *The Navy Department*, 3.

sea, based upon actual maritime experience, and this Jones provided. In 2009, Stephen Budiansky published an article focusing specifically on Jones entitled “Giant Killer in the War of 1812.”<sup>16</sup> Unlike Eckert, Budiansky – a popular historian and respected journalist – nonetheless is much more aware of the importance and nuanced impact Jones had on the navy’s contributions to the eventual strategic draw that was the War of 1812. As noted by Budiansky, Jones “grasped that war is as much about strategy, politics, public relations, finances, manpower, and logistics as it is about fighting.”<sup>17</sup>

A year before the war’s bicentennial, a more robust work on the naval conflict between the United States and Britain was published by the U.S. Naval War College’s Kevin McCranie. McCranie’s *Utmost Gallantry* does much to place Jones in his proper place in terms of his contributions to the wider conflict, and the improved administration of the Department of the Navy.<sup>18</sup> McCranie recognizes that Jones was fully cognizant in early 1813 of the need for a revised strategy to deal with both an increasingly effective British naval blockade, as well as mounting Royal Navy efforts to seek out and destroy the Republic’s few war vessels, in particular her “super-frigates” such as the *Constitution*.<sup>19</sup> McCranie clearly acknowledges Jones

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Budiansky, “Giant Killer in the War of 1812,” *Military History Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 50-60. See also Stephen Budiansky, *Perilous Fight: America’s Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Budiansky, *Perilous Fight*, xiv. Budiansky draws upon a wide array of source material in analyzing Jones’ place in the story of the war, but *Perilous Fight* remains limited primarily to the naval war on the high seas, and discusses the lake campaigns and all the associated difficulties only in passing. Nonetheless, Budiansky does contend that Jones was “a man well ahead of his time” and a leader who during the most critical period of the war (1813-1814) fully recognized the full sweep of issues involved in waging such a conflict.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin D. McCranie, *Utmost Gallantry: The U.S. and Royal Navies at Sea in the War of 1812* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> The U.S. Navy’s so-called “super-frigates” completely embarrassed the Royal Navy in ship-to-ship actions in the opening months of the war. These vessels were somewhat larger, and more heavily built and armed than their Royal Navy equivalents. For more information on these famous vessels, see Ian Toll’s *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company., 2006); Chapter Three in Andrew Lambert’s *The Challenge: Britain Against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2012); also Howard I. Chapelle’s classic work *The History of the American Sailing Navy: The Ships and Their Development* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949) remains a leading reference on these influential ships and their designers.

as having a significant place in the war's naval strategy planning process, as well extolling his administrative and maritime knowledge and understanding, qualities, which enabled the U.S. Navy to resist complete destruction at the hands of the Royal Navy as long as it did. However, like Eckert and Budiansky, McCranie does not explore the inland naval campaign which was to prove so pivotal in the fight to stave off British incursions via those waters, thereby increasing pressure on Britain to seek a peaceful settlement to the stalemated contest.

Undoubtedly, William Jones was an important figure in what some have come to call the "Second War of Independence."<sup>20</sup> However, the vast majority of the research on his place in the larger story has been focused on the blue water struggle, and even then provided in a limited fashion. Recently, naval historian William Dudley made a significant contribution to the Jones record with the publication of *Inside the U.S. Navy of 1812-1815*.<sup>21</sup> Dudley's work focuses on the "material and logistical needs in a war that pitted one of the world's smallest professional navies against the largest and most successful."<sup>22</sup> The principle contribution of his book regards the inner workings of the navy's day-to-day existence, "to explain what it took to build, maintain, man, fit out, provision, and send fighting ships to sea for extended periods of time."<sup>23</sup> Such issues – and their successful execution – are what separate professional, capable navies from those that are not. Dudley's work "considers the problems of high command," and at the top of that command for the U.S. Navy from 1813 to 1814 was William Jones. *Inside the U.S.*

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<sup>20</sup> To cite just one example, see William S. Dudley's work *The Naval War of 1812: America's Second War of Independence* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Company Publishers, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> William S. Dudley, *Inside the US Navy of 1812-1815* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021). William Dudley is the former director of the Naval Historical Center in Washington, DC. Like McCranie, Dudley is a long established professional naval historian with a significant body of work on the War of 1812.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> Dudley, *Inside the US Navy of 1812-1815*, xii. Dudley provides greater contextualization regarding the importance of naval administrative leadership than do many of his predecessors, illustrating the true significance of logistics in keeping the United States in this fight despite the overwhelming naval odds (in particular following Napoleon's exile to Elba).

*Navy* vividly illustrates just how much the young Navy was able to accomplish in the face of daunting odds, and demonstrates that Jones was clearly ahead of his time in reflecting the old military adage attributed to general Omar Bradley that “amateurs study tactics; professionals study logistics.” Happily for the U.S. Navy, Jones was familiar with both, but especially the latter, emphasizing the foundations of naval power – infrastructure.

This essay aims to illustrate and the full sweep of Jones’ decisive, practical, and informed impact on the U.S. Navy’s role in the War of 1812, both at sea and upon the nation’s inland waters. Additionally, the part played by Jones regarding immediate and long-term strategic planning associated with and underpinning the nation’s naval capability (during and following the war) are also examined, as are the daily issues of running a critical arm of national defense during a time of war. In short, this paper considers Jones holistically, and from the perspective of leadership during a time of state crisis, a crisis during which a principle defense institution – the Navy – was ill-prepared. Considering current U.S. debate regarding naval force development, strategic concerns, and increasing budget scrutiny, perhaps a review of William Jones’s tenure as secretary of the navy is worthy of review and consideration, as it may provide today’s leadership with possible lessons and perspective.<sup>24</sup>

By the winter of 1812-1813, a new period in the war’s progression was about to unfold. The great American frigate victories on the high seas against the Royal Navy would be no more. In fact, the USS *Constitution*’s famous battle with the HMS *Java* for the most part brought the curtain down on such engagements (naval challenges/duels between perceived equals etc.)

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<sup>24</sup> To cite just one example of this issue in current naval debate see Elaine Luria (US Congress), “Rightsizing the Fleet: Why the Navy’s New Shipbuilding Plan is Not Enough,” CIMSEC, May 2, 2022, <https://cimsec.org/rightsizing-the-fleet-why-the-navys-new-shipbuilding-plan-is-not-enough/>.



between the two fleets.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Britain's struggle with Napoleon began to take on a new measure of military encouragement, as the Grand Armée's demise on the snowy plains of Russia eventually freed up more of Britain's military might to be directed against her troublesome former colonies to the west. In short, the success of the American frigates against the Royal Navy in time led to either their eventual capture or operational imprisonment, as their very success is what directly led to the increased Royal Navy concentration and blockade of the United States' coasts, from Maine to Florida and on into the Gulf of Mexico and the American southeast.<sup>26</sup>

As British pressure mounted against both U.S. shipping and the country's much smaller navy, the need for a new and improved naval strategy was clear. It was also evident that new leadership would be required if the Republic's navy was to have any hope of staying in the fight for what was becoming increasingly clear would be a potentially lengthy conflict. In William Jones, President Madison found the leader he wanted, and the U.S. Navy needed.<sup>27</sup>

Originally from Philadelphia, William Jones had apprenticed in a shipyard early in his career and served as a soldier in the American Revolution, seeing action at Trenton and Princeton. Furthermore, he possessed practical maritime knowledge gained while serving aboard a privateer vessel during the conflict. Following the war, he went on to have a relatively

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<sup>25</sup> Of note – An additional high seas fight involving the USS *Constitution* did take place in February of 1815 off Cape Verde Island, when the ship took two British vessels (HMS *Cyane* and the HMS *Levant*) following a contested struggle. Unbeknownst to the vessels at the time, the war had ended just days before their bloody engagement.

<sup>26</sup> For a review of naval blockades and the debates as to their historical effectiveness, see the following texts: Lance E. Davis and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History Since 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Brian Arthur, *How Britain Won the War of 1812: The Royal Navy's Blockades of the United States, 1812-1815* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Jones was actually offered the position of Secretary of the Navy in 1801 by President Jefferson, but turned down the offer, possibly to run for Congress, though this is not entirely clear. See Dudley, *Inside the Navy*, pg. 42. "William Jones (1760-1831). Secretary of the Navy, 1813-1814," Naval History and Heritage Command, April 17, 2022, <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/j/jones-william.html>.

successful career in the merchant trade, based out of both Charleston, South Carolina and Philadelphia.<sup>28</sup> Likely influential in his later career as secretary, a portion of his merchant experience included a voyage around the world in one of his own vessels, for he had also been a sea captain. As if all this was not enough to qualify him for the job in the eyes of President Madison – who offered him the position on January 3, 1813 – he had also served in Congress (House of Representatives) as a Republican from 1801-1803.<sup>29</sup> In short, Jones ticked multiple key qualification boxes for the President’s administration, to include: arguably a solid understanding of ships and the sea, key aspects of naval architecture and requirements for building, maintaining, manning, supplying, and routing such vessels, as well as an insider’s understanding of the inner-workings of the body that would be required to endorse and fund such an organization or department – the United States Congress.

In the end, Madison’s selection of William Jones as his Secretary of the Navy was in many ways a brilliant decision. As will be outlined throughout this essay, the steady and firm hand of William Jones not only served the country and Madison Administration well, but provided a solid foundation for the Navy to further solidify its growing institutional reputation, built upon its early operational success with corresponding administrative improvements, and provided an exemplary model relationship between the department and Congress. Perhaps most impressively, Jones began his tenure of office in the midst of a war between a nation almost completely unprepared for a lengthy conflict – in a political environment that was divided as to

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<sup>28</sup> “(1760-1831). Secretary of the Navy, 1813-1814,” Naval History and Heritage Command, April 17, 2022, <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/j/jones-william.html>. Jones (1760-1831) was born in Philadelphia, PA and would pass away in Bethlehem, PA. See also William S. Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, pg. 19; and Dudley, *Inside the Navy*, pg. 41-42.

<sup>29</sup> “Jones, William,” History, Art & Archives United States House of Representatives, April 17, 2022, [https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/J/JONES,-William-\(J000258\)/](https://history.house.gov/People/Listing/J/JONES,-William-(J000258)/). Jones represented Pennsylvania’s 1<sup>st</sup> District in the Seventh Congress, (March 4, 1801-March 3, 1803). For more on Jones’ early life see Eckert’s *The Navy Department* and Dudley’s *Inside the US Navy*.

the war's necessity – being fought against the world's first true superpower.<sup>30</sup> The naval disparity between the two nations was striking. As one historian has noted, some contemporaries even believed that “the Royal Navy had more ships than the Americans had guns.”<sup>31</sup>

Entering office in the midst of conflict, Jones revealed his ability to address the department's multitude of issues quickly and efficiently. Offered the position, Jones accepted the job on January 14<sup>th</sup>, and then followed up his acceptance with a meeting with President Madison and then Treasury Secretary Gallatin – all before settling into his Washington residence.<sup>32</sup>

According to most accounts, the first order of business for the new Secretary was to place the department on firm ground from a qualified and motivated staffing perspective. In short order, Jones had long-serving Chief Clerk Charles Goldsborough removed from office and replaced by Benjamin Homans. Homans had a mariner's background as well (former merchant captain) and was also a Republican, making the approval process that much easier.<sup>33</sup> Given the ongoing war with Great Britain, Jones was astute enough to know that an organized, efficient, and financially aware department would be required if the navy was to have any hope against the vastly superior Royal Navy, which was increasingly making its presence felt along the country's coastlines. Clearly Jones was anxious to get to work on the myriad of issues impacting the department, especially given the mounting pressure being applied against the nation by the Royal Navy's blockade. Later additional personnel were shuffled and added to further improve both the

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the status and supremacy of Britain's Royal Navy in this period, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 154.

<sup>31</sup> Nathan Miller, *Broadsides*, 335.

<sup>32</sup> Madison, James, and William Jones. *William Jones to James Madison*. 1813. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mjm016839/>. See also Daughan, *1812: The Navy's War*, 157.

<sup>33</sup> For a solid overview of Jones' early administrative issues in the first weeks in office, see Thomas Sheppard's *Commanding Petty Despots: The American Navy in the New Republic* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2022) 140-141.

administrative ability of the office, as well as Jones' ability to control the increasingly active and dispersed regional powers and personnel of the department. It should be noted that Jones almost immediately saw himself as a reformer regarding the department. In writing to his wife on the day of his arrival in Washington, he commented on the issues confronting him by noting that "They arise from the corruption of self-interested men who have taken root in the establishment..." and he intended to address the issues much as he would the trees and shrubs in his yard.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to a new head of the service, the U.S Navy was also in need of a new strategy, as the Royal Navy had by the beginning of 1813 made it very difficult for American ships – especially warships – to sortie from harbor unnoticed or unchallenged. As such, the ability of the now much-praised American frigates to replicate their 1812 operational successes was increasingly unlikely. In fact, as has been noted by British historian Jeremy Black, following 1812 the Royal Navy did not lose any further frigates to either single ship actions – or even flotilla actions – with American vessels.<sup>35</sup> By 1813 the Royal Navy had multiple ships of the line on the North American station, as well as 38 frigates and other smaller vessels which severely hampered the U.S. Navy's freedom of action. The USS *United States*, USS *Macedonian*, and USS *Constellation* were all effectively neutralized by the British coastal blockade. An experienced captain with great respect for the power of the Royal Navy and its ability to squeeze the nation's commercial and naval power to the extreme, William Jones developed and proposed a new strategy and naval system to ensure American naval resiliency.<sup>36</sup> The purpose was not to

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<sup>34</sup> See William S. Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* - Volume II 1813 (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1992), 35.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Black, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 130. See also Jonathan R. Dull, *American Naval History, 1607-1865: Overcoming the Colonial Legacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 58.

<sup>36</sup> See Jeremy Black, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon*, 130.

win the war outright, but to ensure Britain endured sufficient losses that the United States might have chips with which to bargain at the eventual peace table. It is worth noting that in William Dudley's *Naval War of 1812*, he contends that Jones "proved to be a competent administrator in an overburdened department, though not a naval strategist." Dudley overstates this latter point, as Jones did exhibit strategic thinking, but did so within the context of national resource constraint, as well as financial and military realism. The country simply did not have the resources to build large warship after large warship if in the end the odds were that they would be blockaded in port, and unable to cruise freely. In fact, given the tremendous odds against the U.S. Navy in 1813, both in terms of an ever-larger Royal Navy presence in American waters – a presence represented by ships of the line, of which the U.S. had none – and the country's considerable financial issues, a first-rate "competent" administrator is exactly what was needed at the time. In addition, Jones could (and did) actually provide sound naval advice to President Madison based on his own practical experience with both privateering and global commercial shipping, something his predecessor was unable to do. Furthermore, Jones would in fact introduce a new naval strategy – based on a realistic assessment of available options – as will be explained.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to administrative reforms, Jones leveraged his knowledge of the Royal Navy's power and the strategic realities facing the nation's war effort to initiate multiple significant plans, both at sea and upon the nation's northern frontier – the Great Lakes. In fact, Jones' concerns regarding the Great Lakes Theater are made clear in his January 27, 1813 letter to Commodore Isaac Chauncey at Sackets Harbor, New York. In the letter, Jones demonstrates his grasp of the strategic vulnerability to both the United States and British Canada posed by these

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<sup>37</sup> William Dudley, *Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, 3.

water frontiers, for they represented potential invasion routes (and logistical support avenues) for either combatant to utilize in an attack.

Jones conveys his concerns to Chauncey, noting that “It is impossible to attach too much importance to our naval operations on the Lakes – the success of the ensuing campaign will depend absolutely upon our superiority on all the lakes – & every effort, & resource, must be directed to that object.”<sup>38</sup> Again, Jones demonstrates a firm grasp of strategy, and associated national vulnerabilities. In essence, within a week of taking office Jones the planner, administrator, and former ship captain was taking a wide-angle review of the country’s strategic options and considering how to best marshal his extremely limited resources to confront the world’s naval superpower. In taking stock of these limited resources, several key strategic and operational realities came to dictate Jones’s policies for moving the navy forward.

Among the first issues confronting Jones’ fleet was the need for additional vessels. Before Jones was assigned his cabinet position, Congress had passed a naval expansion act in early January of 1813. Under the act, Congress authorized the construction of four 74-gun ships of the line, along with six 44-gun heavy frigates, à la the USS *Constitution*.<sup>39</sup> However, given the reality of the tightening British blockade, which severely hampered the movement of ship building supplies up and down the American coasts, passing acts to build the nation’s warships was one thing and actually securing, moving, and completing those same warships under wartime conditions was quite another prospect entirely. Nonetheless, Jones promptly took stock of the situation and began actively directing the appropriate activity to attempt to meet the build plans for the fleet authorized by Congress. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, Jones inquired via a letter to

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<sup>38</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 419.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. See also Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy: The Ships and Their Development* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1949), 255-256.

the Washington Navy Yard constructor, Mr. William Doughty, as to the quantity of “timber, plank, thickstuff &c now in the yard” so that he might begin to assess which yards had the appropriate material to build the appropriated vessels, as well as which supplies would need to be secured to keep progress on the various vessels moving forward. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, Jones directed the Navy agent in Boston to “procure on the best terms in your power all the necessary plank, thickstuff and other materials of wood for a 74 gun ship.” Jones was intimately involved in the administration of the yards, their personnel, and associated financial situations. Among his inquiries in his letter to Doughty was also a status check of the supply of “Live Oak,” which was critical in the building of superior, long lasting war ships.<sup>40</sup> Live oak, typically secured from the coastal or barrier islands of the southern states, in particular Georgia, was highly sought after for its excellent shipbuilding qualities, strength, and ability to endure. However, live oak is also an extremely dense material, making transport by sea the only practical way to move it to the assigned shipyards (especially given the exceedingly poor condition of the nation’s road network).<sup>41</sup> With the Royal Navy’s vessels steadily improving their ability to interdict such coastal trade, moving the required shipbuilding material via the sea became increasingly difficult, thus hampering further build-up of the American fleet, especially in terms of the larger ships.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Jones’s ability to quickly enact all the Navy’s required procedural and

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<sup>40</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 44, 46. For more on timber supplies, applications considered, and Jones’ approved securing of and allocation for use, see William Jones, “Letter from the Secretary of the Navy, Respecting the Execution of the Laws for the Increase of the Navy to the Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs,” Ordered Printed on March 16, 1814 (Washington: A. and G. Way: 1814); Congressman William Lowndes, South Carolina, was Chairman of the Naval Committee. U.S. Naval War College Archive, MSC-364, File MSI 259. File – Box 15, Folder: 1.

<sup>41</sup> Regarding live oak characteristics, and its importance to naval shipbuilding, see Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652-1862* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 23, 38. One of the key island for such live oak timber was St. Simons Island, GA.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the intricacies of 19<sup>th</sup> Century shipbuilding under these conditions, see William S. Dudley, *Inside the Navy of 1812-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 118-119. To date, Dudley’s work is by far the most broad-ranging and comprehensive study of the inner workings of the U.S. Navy’s administration during the war, in all of its nuanced facets.

administrative changes was severely limited by both the war and the Royal Navy. Jones was left to plan, dexterously engage with Congress, send orders to the appropriate yards and suppliers, work to ensure navy leadership and manpower was employed at, or moved to, the most appropriate locations (despite the blockade), and then hope for the best of situations and regional leadership to keep the department's plans moving forward and the Royal Navy at bay.

As a former member of Congress himself, Jones fully grasped the importance of maintaining a solid relationship with Capitol Hill, and especially the various committees concerning the navy and national defense. A month after taking office, Jones engaged Congress, then considering a naval construction bill, and began to lay out his practical views regarding a strategy to counter the Royal Navy's dominance at sea. Writing to Senator Samuel Smith of Maryland, Chairman of the Senate's Naval Committee, Jones outlined his support for the building of more sloops of war for the navy, as "their force is inferior only to a frigate – their cost and expenditure only about one-third in actual service; and in pursuit of the commerce and light cruisers of the enemy three sloops of the class proposed may reasonably be expected to produce a much greater effect than a single frigate."<sup>43</sup> Jones went on to highlight to Senator Smith the value of such vessels in protecting American coastal trading from British depredation, a key issue if the navy's shipbuilding programs were to have any hope given that much of the shipyard materials had to be moved by sea. In this one brief letter to Smith, Jones has delineated key strategic comprehension points and a vision for his term in office. He noted that while the frigate victories of 1812 were impressive and earned the service a good deal of much needed prestige, the frigates would now likely be outnumbered or bottled up in port by the British blockade – with little hope of escape. Smaller vessels – i.e. sloops – could attack and overwhelm

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<sup>43</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 45.



British commerce at sea, and were also more likely to evade detection by the British blockade than the larger frigates. And finally, Jones was acutely conscious of the expense and time associated with building frigates, as compared to the smaller, and possibly more effective sloops. Thematically, the recommendation to Congress for supporting a smaller class of vessel to engage the Royal Navy was not new for Jones, for as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February he was calling for “a species of force” better suited for the protection of coastal convoys and for attacking enemy vessels, singling out “corvettes such as the *Hornet* or rather larger.”<sup>44</sup>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1813, writing to some of his commanders in port for refitting, Jones supplied further evidence of his appreciation for the limitations of his fleet vis-à-vis that of the Royal Navy. In this message, Jones noted that “Our great inferiority in naval strength, does not permit us to meet them on this ground without hazarding the precious germ of our national glory – we have however the means of creating a powerful diversion, & of turning the scale of annoyance against the enemy.”<sup>45</sup> In essence, Jones was clearly acknowledging that the struggle between the two navies was an unequal one, and a struggle in which the fledging navy (“germ” of future greatness) should not be wasted when instead it can be used more effectively in harassing British commerce in European waters, the Caribbean, or intercepting British resupply efforts to Canada in the approaches to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.<sup>46</sup> Jones further held that such activity would not only increase the pressure on British shipping, but would also divert some

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<sup>44</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 26. Letter from Secretary Jones to Congressman Burwell Bassett, Chairman of the Naval Committee, February 2, 1813. Jones’ mention of the *Hornet* is a reference to the USS *Hornet*, a well-known sloop of war built in Baltimore and launched in 1805. Corvettes were small, single gun deck warships widely used for inshore operations and coastal convoy work. Differences between corvettes and sloops of war of this period are somewhat limited, and vary according to navy, design etc.

<sup>45</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 48.

<sup>46</sup> For examples of the impact of these smaller (in particular sloops/brigs) U.S. commerce raiders see Budiansky’s *Perilous Fight*, 338-339 and Andrew Lambert’s *The Challenge*, 256-257. Such cruises were successfully undertaken by the U.S. ships *Wasp*, *Enterprise*, and *Peacock*, to name a few. The *Wasp* alone had destroyed seven ships along the Irish coast and the English Channel, as well as the Royal Navy brig *Reindeer*, Budiansky 338.

Royal Navy resources to protect that trade and thereby relieve some of the pressure on American coastal shipping.<sup>47</sup> In short, Jones the naval and power realist, in the hope of extending the navy's survival, was advocating a *guerre de course* rather than a duel between two unequal fleets in an attrition-based struggle, a struggle the much smaller U.S. Navy could not win. Given that the war against Napoleon showed potential signs of improving for Britain, the ability of the Royal Navy to eventually reinforce its presence on the North American station clearly revealed the wisdom of Jones' strategy choice.<sup>48</sup> As more – to include more capable – British ships arrived off the American coasts as a result of lessening pressure from the French, the odds that the U.S. frigates would remain bottled up in port only increased. As a result, Jones' support for smaller, quick, faster and cheaper to build vessels made complete tactical (and arguably, strategic) sense in the face of a growing enemy presence. Fundamentally, Jones was advocating to Madison, Congress, and his captains an asymmetric response to Britain's more traditional and increasingly effective naval blockade strategy.

To support Jones' strategic priorities, and despite occasional political pressure to do otherwise, Jones made tough decisions early on to realistically defend against British naval superiority. In late February 1813, in order to free up much needed manpower and reduce cost to the department on what Jones believed were ineffective defensive platforms, he reduced the number and distribution of the navy's Jefferson-era gunboats. Though this decision again reveals a clear-minded, focused leader in action, it was a decision that would come with criticism

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<sup>47</sup> The British did in fact move to a convoy system; see Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine, *Naval Blockades and Seapower: Strategies and Counter-Strategies, 1805-2005* (London: Routledge, 2006), 39.

<sup>48</sup> For relatively recent analysis of the historical context and efficacy of naval commerce raiding (*guerre de course*) see Douglas C. Peifer, "Maritime Commerce Warfare: The Coercive Response of the Weak?," *The Naval War College Review* 66, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 83-109; and Kevin D. McCranie, "Waging Protracted Naval War: U.S. Navy Commerce Raiding During the War of 1812," in *Naval War College Newport Papers 40 - Commerce Raiding: Historical Case Studies, 1755-2009*, ed. Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2013), 57-71.

later on, when the British began to launch amphibious operations against various American ports, most famously illustrated in the burning of Washington, D.C. and the attempt to attack Baltimore. However, to be fair to Jones, the gunboats did prove largely ineffective in stopping the advances and shore raiding carried out by the Royal Navy throughout the war. The gunboats were only truly useful when well-led and manned, and reinforced by well-placed and exercised shore defenses, which was seldom the case. An additional key point for Jones in reducing the number of gunboats was to free up maintenance funds to support the building of the new sloops for which he was advocating.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to working to secure funds for new warships, and the men to man them, Jones remained seriously concerned about the few frigates he still had under his control, albeit primarily frigates bottled up in port by the British. Nonetheless, it was these so-called super frigates and their respective victories on the high seas that had brought Congressional support and prestige to the service. Jones intended to preserve these vessels as much as possible, while playing to their strengths if and when they could slip through the blockade and again prey on British maritime commerce – his preferred target for the U.S. fleet. If and when vessels could slip through the blockade and cruise against British shipping, rather than allowing the crews of such vessels (regardless if they were frigates or smaller warships) to be reduced through the manning of captured prizes, he ordered his captains to destroy captured vessels at sea. Writing to John Orde Creighton of the USS *Rattlesnake* on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Jones stated the following: “The great

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<sup>49</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 52-54. For additional information on the issue of Jefferson’s gunboats, see Craig L. Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States, 1785-1827* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980). A watered-down version of the debate can be found in Richard Harding’s *Modern Naval History: Debates and Prospects* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 24-25. Another interesting discussion of the “Naval Debate of 1812” can be found in *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* by Harold and Margaret Sprout (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1966), 66-68, in which they discuss the two-day pro-navy speech given by South Carolina’s Langdon Cheves, the Chairman of the House Naval Committee.

object however, is the destruction of the commerce of the enemy and bringing into port the prisoners, in order to exchange against our unfortunate countryman who may fall into his hands. You will therefore man no prize, unless the value, place of capture and other favorable circumstances, shall render her safe arrival morally certain.” In the same note Jones went on to remind Creighton to avoid the enemy’s “cruisers,” a reference to the single ship actions of the war’s first year, as they have by that point become too risky.<sup>50</sup> Here Jones is referring to the fact that by 1813 the Royal Navy had increased its gunnery practice and modified some of its frigates to be more on par with those of the United States. Not only is Jones’ policy guidance new to the fleet, it comes with potential blowback risk from captains and crew, as traditionally prizes meant the potential for significant financial gain for officers and crews. This limiting of prize money could negatively impact manpower availability for the navy, as there were no such tactical restrictions for the numerous privateer vessels operating from American ports, which in turn served as a lucrative draw for seasoned sailors.

While working to stabilize and streamline the effective running of the secretariat, negotiate with Congress for increased funding, ship building programs, armaments etc., Jones had another major strategic and material worry – a possible two front war. On the American coast, his frigates were refitting from their 1812 cruises and looking for opportunities to slip through the British blockade. But to the north and west along the Great Lakes, the U.S. Army’s attempts to invade Canada had not gone well, having been repulsed on all attempts. Unless the Navy could provide a dose of its 1812 élan to the front, the region could provide the British Army an invasion route to the United States, and possibly even allow for the Union to be regionally carved up via the traditional invasion route down Lake Champlain, Lake George, on

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<sup>50</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 296-297.

into Albany and then the Hudson River Valley.<sup>51</sup> Simply put, “no invading army – American or British – could operate offensively in this region without having to move on, across, or along water.”<sup>52</sup> Given the economic pain being endured by the New England states due to the British blockade, and their original prewar objections to the conflict (at least in some cases), the threat of a British victory in the region leading to a potential militarized line between the regions was not entirely outside the realm of possibility.

In addition to continuing to support the eastern naval yards and the new Congressionally-approved ship building program, and myriad other issues ranging from pay, personnel, discipline, and a blue water naval strategy, Jones had to make plans to defend the Great Lakes, the nation’s backdoor invasion route. In a nutshell, a crash building program to develop a fleet was needed, and quickly, as the Royal Navy also understood the potential of the theater.<sup>53</sup> Essentially, the nation that controlled the lakes, controlled the war, as this region’s waters served as a two-way invasion route, available to whichever side was able to secure it, either in totality or for a given time at a strategic location. Luckily for Jones, the navy and the United States, a few excellent individuals were either available or made available by Jones to close the door on any such British invasion plans.

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<sup>51</sup> One prominent historian of the War of 1812 referred to Lake Champlain as “a freshwater sally port from which an army could strike at the economic heartland of either country....” See David Curtis Skaggs, “More Important Than Perry’s Victory,” *Naval History Magazine* Vol. 27, no. 5 (September 2013): 20-28. Skaggs even suggests that Macdonough’s victory against the British on Lake Champlain was “more important tactically, strategically, and diplomatically” than Perry’s victory on Lake Erie.

<sup>52</sup> Charles E. Brodine, Jr., “The Wars Most Challenging Theater,” *Naval History Magazine* Vol. 27, no. 5 (September 2013): 16-19.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Eventually, the naval building race on Lake Ontario would include plans for the building of two 100-gun ships-of-the-line for the United States Navy, despite the nation’s near financial bankruptcy status.

Canadian historian Robert Malcomson has argued that “The War of 1812 began poorly for the United States.”<sup>54</sup> Much of that “poorly” executed effort was in the Great Lakes region as the army failed to simply walk over Canada as many of the pre-war hawks had anticipated, and as such Jones knew that the region was critical and would demand significant time, resources, and quality leadership. Luckily for Jones and the United States, the country (and more importantly the Navy) had leaders with such qualities to spare due to prior conflicts such as the Quasi-War with France (1798-1800), and the campaign against the Barbary states in the First Barbary War (1801-1805), both of which served as virtual finishing schools for naval leadership. Today, when most remember the war on the lakes, two major American victories typically spring to mind: the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1813 and a year later (almost to the day), the Battle of Lake Champlain on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1814.<sup>55</sup> These twin victories by the navy had a profound effect on the outcome of the war (and the Navy’s esprit de corps), despite the army’s earlier failed attempts to threaten Canada. However, in both cases, the battles could have gone very differently if not for the Herculean effort of local commanders, shore-based naval artisans, and supporting them all, Secretary Jones’s firm leadership, especially in terms of logistics and supply.

The conflict’s Great Lakes campaigns were complex and laden with tactical and strategic obstacles, and several key points need to be fully understood from a logistical and organizational perspective. To block any potential British/Canadian invasion, flotillas of modern warships had to be built upon the shores of the lakes, equipped, manned, and then led into combat with

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario, 1812-1814* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>55</sup> Note: The Battle of Lake Erie is also known by some as the Battle of Put-In-Bay due to the fact that the battle took place off of Ohio in the vicinity of Put-In-Bay. Also worth consideration, Lake Erie’s gunnery duel is considered the Navy’s first squadron v. squadron engagement in service history. See David Curtis Skaggs, “More Important Than Perry’s Victory,” *Naval History Magazine* Vol. 27, no. 5 (September 2013): 20-28.

minimal time for training in such matters as tactical maneuvering, ship handling, gunnery etc.<sup>56</sup> For many commanders, operating in a near wilderness with limited local resources, to build such fleets and then lead them against experienced foes, would likely lead one to believe the odds insurmountable.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, construction of ships and gunboats suitable for lake duty went forward all the same. Based on the shores of Lake Erie at Presque Isle (Erie, PA), the U.S. Navy began to build a flotilla to secure control of the lake. The difficulties of building warships in the region were numerous. As recently noted by one historian, “Presque Isle had a nearly endless supply of timber but lacked most other resources. No ironworks or sawmill existed nearby. No materials for rope, sailcloth, and anchors. No source of ordnance, ammunition, or labor. Everything had to be made there or carried by wagon train.”<sup>58</sup> As described by Jones himself in October of 1814 when writing to President Madison about the situation on Lake Ontario, the war on the lakes boiled down to “warfare of dockyards and arsenals.”<sup>59</sup>

Despite less-than-ideal ship building facilities, to say nothing of provision of food and shelter for workers, sailors etc., Commodore Isaac Chauncey was directed by Jones to build two brigs on Lake Erie. In doing so, Jones also made his faith in Chauncey’s leadership and abilities clear, directing him to also build another corvette at Sackets Harbor. “Indeed you are to consider the absolute superiority on all the lakes, as the only limit to your authority.”<sup>60</sup> And while this was well stated, to command the lakes Chauncey had to have the ships, men, guns etc. Thanks in large part to the Brooklyn, New York-based expert design and ship building team of Noah and

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<sup>56</sup> It’s worth noting that approx. 40 percent of the men serving on Perry’s ships at the Battle of Lake Erie actually came from Army elements, according to Charles Brodine; see “The War’s Most Challenging Theater,” 16-19.

<sup>57</sup> For a good overview of the war on the lakes, see David Curtis Skaggs and Gerard T. Altoff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign 1812-1813* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), and Robert Malcomson, *Warships of the Great Lakes 1754-1834* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> William J. Prom, “The Brothers Brown,” *Naval Institute Proceedings* 36, no. 1 (February 2022): 46-53.

<sup>59</sup> Crawford, *The Naval War of 1812 Vol. III*, 631.

<sup>60</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812 Vol. II*, 419-420.

Adam Brown, the two brigs were completed in time, despite conditions imposed by the relative wilderness and weather, to meet the British.<sup>61</sup>

Thanks to Jones' leadership, planning, and selection of the right people to develop – virtually overnight – a fleet on the shores of the nation's northern "sea" frontier, the naval defense of this potential line of attack was ultimately successful beyond all expectations.<sup>62</sup> And while Jones may not have done all this on his own, it was his consideration and orders to the Navy's leadership that made such movement of key personnel and equipment a reality. In addition to ensuring that an effective fleet could be built in the wilderness beside Lake Erie, and another alongside Lake Champlain, like any true leader Jones also made time to support technological advances and experimentation that could benefit his department. In April of 1813, Robert Fulton wrote to Jones, requesting that Jones allow him the use of a fire ship and accompanying men with which to "experiment on the practice of torpedoes."<sup>63</sup> In mid-May Jones contacted Jacob Lewis, commanding the New York flotilla, to assist Fulton with the experiments, providing him with one such vessel and appropriate men. Ever concerned about potential associated costs, Jones was quick to also note that "no expense whatever on account of these experiments" ought to come back to the department, as the department was already supplying the vessel and some crew, which was believed to be sufficient.<sup>64</sup> By June of 1813, Jones was also receiving updates from these New York experiments with Fulton regarding the

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<sup>61</sup> William J. Prom, "The Brothers Brown," 47.

<sup>62</sup> Given the success of the Brown brothers' shipbuilding enterprise in New York (especially in regards to the construction of successful privateers), it is likely the Jones was well-aware of their capabilities given his own background in and ownership of trading vessels.

<sup>63</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 111-114. Note: Torpedoes in this case is a reference to what are now considered mines.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.



testing of ships' guns underwater (not to be confused with mines) against submerged targets.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, the tests reported positive results, with guns being fired underwater to a degree that

Jacob Lewis reported to Jones that the "submarine batteries can be turned to good account."<sup>66</sup>

Earlier, in May, Jones had also had the Baltimore commanding officer supply a local individual

with powder, a boat, and men to attempt related experimentation in the hope of possibly

destroying Royal Navy vessels operating in the Patapsco River.<sup>67</sup>

By late 1814, Jones was also involved in official inquiries regarding other Fulton projects, to include steam-driven warships, or steam-driven floating batteries, which could be employed to support harbor defenses.<sup>68</sup> Simply put, Secretary Jones was an advocate of the practical application of science to the problems of naval warfare, especially if it could help the United States break or regionally incapacitate the Royal Navy's blockade. As one writer has explained, Jones encouraged his officers to engage persons involved in such enterprises and solicit reports to the department regarding unique and potentially useful research, or as the writer described them, "naval appliances and improvements."<sup>69</sup> In addition to Fulton's experiments with torpedoes (mines), Jones also reviewed reports and sometimes supported work regarding everything from flammable liquids for attacking vessels to bullet proof ships and repeating arms. Jones' interest even went so far as to support Uriah Brown's plans for an early "submarine

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<sup>65</sup> Note: Among the reasons for the experimentation, besides scientific advancement, was that Congress offered a prize in March of 1813 to anyone who could sink a British ship. See Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 111.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>67</sup> Dudley, *The Naval War of 1812* Vol. II, 355.

<sup>68</sup> Michael J. Crawford, *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* Vol. III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), 640-641.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Oscar Paullin, "Naval Administration Under Secretaries of the Navy Smith, Hamilton, and Jones, 1801-1814," *Naval Institute Proceedings* Vol. XXXII, No. 4 (October 1906), 1289-1328. See also William S. Dudley's *Inside the US Navy of 1812-1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 293, for more on the Navy and Jones' support for marine-related innovation.

boat.”<sup>70</sup> Much like today’s U.S. Navy, the top tier of leadership recognized the importance of scientific research and development, even those projects considered possible longshots, as a way of not only keeping the service relevant but also in the belief that one such experiment might eventually change the very nature of naval warfare, much as the submarine would in the twentieth century.

By late 1814, the duties of the secretariat and the associated pressures of war, along with personal financial concerns, began to weigh heavily on Jones, and in September he submitted his resignation, leaving office on December 1, 1814. It seems the Royal Navy’s blockade was impacting even the financial wellbeing of the Secretary, a merchant himself. It is additionally worth noting that for a significant period of time (May 1813 - February 1814) Jones had also served as acting Secretary of the Treasury, adding to his already demanding and stressful administration during a time of war and increasing fiscal constraint due to the same.<sup>71</sup> Personal financial concerns, combined with the stress of the job were the reasons Jones cited in requesting that Madison accept his resignation as head of the Navy, an institution that he had done much to ensure was – and would remain – organized, respected, and impactful going forward. As noted by William Dudley, “Jones had performed well under the stress of organizing victories and suffering defeats not experienced even in Benjamin Stoddert’s tenure during the Quasi-War or Robert Smith’s in the course of the First Barbary War.”<sup>72</sup>

In the final assessment, the fourth secretary of the navy was a figure that until the publication of Dudley’s 2021 *Inside the US Navy of 1812-1815* has not received the attention and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 1321. See also “The Engineering Experiment Station: Its Contribution to Our Common Reservoir of Technical Knowledge,” *Bureau of Ships Journal* 2, no. 11 (March 1954): 6. (author not listed).

<sup>71</sup> See Dudley, *Inside the US Navy*, 271 for details regarding Jones’ resignation as secretary. His financial losses included one of his own vessels.

<sup>72</sup> Dudley, *Inside the US Navy*, 182.

credit he demonstrably earned. Leading the nation's fleet through arguably the two most critical years of the conflict, when finally the full weight of Britain's attention could be turned toward her former colonies, Jones ensured that not only did the U.S. Navy continue to build and grow – despite the British blockade – but did so in the face of diminishing financial resources and without the consistent glow of public adoration for the navy that came from the frigate victories in the first months of the war. Jones' war was a war of national survival against a vastly superior navy, a navy that could land hostile forces on American shores nearly wherever it chose to do so. Seeking to overcome the pre-war naval weakness of the Jeffersonian period with its reliance upon a gunboat navy, Jones more than ably led the Republic's naval administration, allowed its commanders the freedom of action to stave off national defeat both at sea and upon the critical inland waters, and planned for its future in terms of vessels, dockyards, training, and improved administrative structure. Besides working to ensure adequate timber was secured for current and future naval construction across the Navy's yards, Jones also endeavored to ensure the service's future in terms of more secure dockyards. One such site under consideration during Jones' tenure was on the east bank of the Hudson River above the Highlands, New York. The "Highlands" refers to an area just above West Point on the Hudson River.<sup>73</sup> This site would eventually be developed under the post-war Madison administration as the West Point Foundry, and produce artillery for the nation up through the American Civil War and beyond.

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<sup>73</sup> See William Jones, "Letter from The Secretary of the Navy Respecting the Execution of the Laws for the Increase of the Navy, to the Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs," (Washington: A. and G. Way: 1814). U.S. Naval War College Archive, MSC-364, File MSI 259. File – Box 15, Folder: 1. See also the following National Park Service report: [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/2020-September-West-Point-Foundry-Redacted-508-FINAL-FOR-SECRETARY\\_reduced-part01.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/upload/2020-September-West-Point-Foundry-Redacted-508-FINAL-FOR-SECRETARY_reduced-part01.pdf), accessed on May 25, 2022.

In the past, some historians and commentators have said that Britain won the war of 1812, Brian Arthur's 2011 *How Britain Won the War of 1812* being but one example.<sup>74</sup> However, such a claim is an affront to historical reality and to the legacy of the fourth secretary. While Britain may not have lost any more frigate-size or larger vessels after the first few months of the war, in that period she did lose a good number of quality ships (both naval and commercial), and her aura of near invincibility amongst other seafaring nations. Additionally, as Britain considered dispatching the Duke of Wellington to Canada to prosecute the war against the Americans even he doubted the practical value of the decision.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the Treaty of Ghent itself, reverting the relationship between the two countries to status quo ante bellum, speaks for itself.<sup>76</sup> Neither side really gained much worth debating seriously; rather, in the end the war of 1812 was a draw militarily speaking. However, for the United States, a new sense of self-respect and national pride did come from the impressive battles and fight exhibited by its relatively small, but very professional navy. It was a naval record and foundation that a much larger and influential navy could be built upon at a later flood tide. John Lehman, the sixty-fifth secretary of the navy, noted that William Jones was "a forceful and effective leader of the Navy in the War

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<sup>74</sup> Brian Arthur, *How Britain Won the War of 1812: The Royal Navy's Blockades of the United States, 1812-1815* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2011). While a full discussion of each country's war aims is beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that if events had gone differently for Britain along the northern frontier, odds are the conflict could have become much more complex in terms of Britain's ultimate war aims, as events in the Gulf of Mexico suggested in 1815 (Battle of New Orleans, Mobile Bay etc.).

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Lambert, *The Challenge: Britain Against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2012), 393; see also Jeremy Black, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 140. Wellington reportedly said that "a naval superiority on the lakes was a sine qua non of success in a war on the frontier of Canada." And thanks to Jones, Chauncey, and Perry, the British did not secure regional naval superiority.

<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the 2,000+ British casualties at the Battle of New Orleans may also differ as to the usefulness of continuing a fight which neither side was likely to "win," especially the British after having had to fight France and Napoleon for the previous twenty years. Although the British Army was soundly defeated at New Orleans, within a matter of weeks they will successfully land at Mobile Bay, and attack and force the surrender of Fort Bowyer, guarding the approaches to Mobile. The continued British threat to the American Southeast could have extended the war, and perhaps even changed some of the diplomatic bargaining chips if news of the Treaty of Ghent had not arrived just after the fort's surrender. See Jeremy Black's *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon*, 200-203; also for a brief explanation of the battle for Fort Bowyer, see the American Battlefield Trust website: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/battles-fort-bowyer-war-1812>.

of 1812.”<sup>77</sup> Lehman’s praise, however, only provides a limited hint as to the practical, critical, and impactful contributions Secretary Jones made to the Navy in arguably its time of greatest institutional peril. Following shortly after the end of another great naval challenge for the United States, the Second World War, another writer perhaps best summed up the full scope of Jones’s contributions to the Navy with the following:

No other Secretary of the Navy has been confronted with odds so adverse as those faced by Jones. With inadequate facilities and forces he was expected to protect our shores from invasion; send our few but excellent frigates and sloops on commerce destroying cruises which would be both profitable and reasonably safe; map strategy and suggest tactics to the commanders on the lakes and oceans; and furnish personnel and materiel for all campaigns. And all this had to be done in the face of the greatest naval power of its day.<sup>78</sup>

In short, Jones left a mark upon the service and the nation at a critical moment in both their histories, providing a model for future secretaries, and then like a nineteenth century Cincinnatus, left quietly to return to a life in commerce.

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<sup>77</sup> John Lehman, *On Seas of Glory: Heroic Men, Great Ships, and Epic Battles of the American Navy* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 397.

<sup>78</sup> Kenneth L. Brown, “Mr. Madison’s Secretary of Navy,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* Vol. 73, No. 8 (August 1947), 967.

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