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COMMEMORATION CEREMONY APRIL 24, 1906

We have met to honor the memory of that man who gave our Navy its earliest traditions of heroism and victory.

—Charles Bonaparte, secretary of the navy,
April 24, 1906

IT WAS CALLED THE GREATEST military and naval pageant ever witnessed in the United States.¹ Five thousand guests, there by invitation only, crowded the Naval Academy's recently completed armory at Annapolis. Thousands more lined the streets from the railway station to the armory to cheer President Roosevelt and the dignitaries accompanying him as they made their way from their special train to the great hall.

The hall was decorated simply but elegantly in the red, white, and blue colors of the French and American flags, the French tricolors as well as the Stars and Stripes, because it was in France that the lost remains of John Paul Jones had been buried for a hundred years and then recovered. It was the French who had given him his first funeral when the Americans would not, the French who with special foresight had anticipated a future day when the United States might regret its oversight (therefore preserving his mortal remains, unusually, in a lead coffin filled with alcohol and straw), the French who indulged the six-year search for his grave, and the French

who, when the grave was finally found, delivered those remains to the custody of an American naval squadron to be returned to American shores.

In addition to the dignitaries, naval officers, and other seated guests (not, however, the diplomatic corps; it was decided to exclude all of them except for the French—how could one invite Great Britain’s ambassador to glorify the victories of John Paul Jones over the English fleet?), there stood at attention along both sides of the hall the academy’s uniformed midshipmen as well as marines and sailors from three French and eight U.S. war vessels anchored in the nearby bay: *Admiral Aube*, *Condé*, and *Marseilles* from France and *Alabama*, *Indiana*, *Illinois*, *Iowa*, *Cleveland*, *Minneapolis*, *Des Moines*, and *Denver* from the United States. “The great hall,” observed one attendee, “glistened with gold lace and flashing steel.” There were also primary colors and quaintness: the brilliant red coats of the Marine Band, the minutemen uniforms of the Maryland militia.

The purpose of this pomp was to commemorate the achievement of Revolutionary War naval hero John Paul Jones and to commit his mortal remains to a final place of honor on American soil. The body of Jones, sealed in the lead coffin in which it had originally been buried, was now further encased in an oak casket with eight silver handles, the lid secured by sixteen silver screws. It had arrived on American soil the previous year after being carried from Paris to Cherbourg to the deck of the U.S. battleship *Brooklyn* and then across the ocean to a pier at Annapolis and a temporary vault at the Naval Academy, where it would await formal commemoration ceremonies and final burial. The details of Jones’s long-delayed return from a lost Paris grave are the subject of later chapters. We begin the story near its end, in June 1905, on the northern shores of France, nine months before the April 24 commemoration.

A squadron (officially the “John Paul Jones Squadron”) had been dispatched to retrieve Jones’s remains and return them to the United States. It consisted of four vessels: the flagship *Brooklyn*, *Tacoma*, *Galveston*, and *Chattanooga*, these vessels’ names representing the principal sections of the country (East and West Coasts, the Gulf, and the interior).² Rear Admiral Charles Sigsbee, former commander of the battleship *Maine*, was flag officer. The squadron set sail on June 18 and arrived at Cherbourg on June 30. Cherbourg was the destination port chosen rather than the larger