

## Qualifications of a Naval Officer

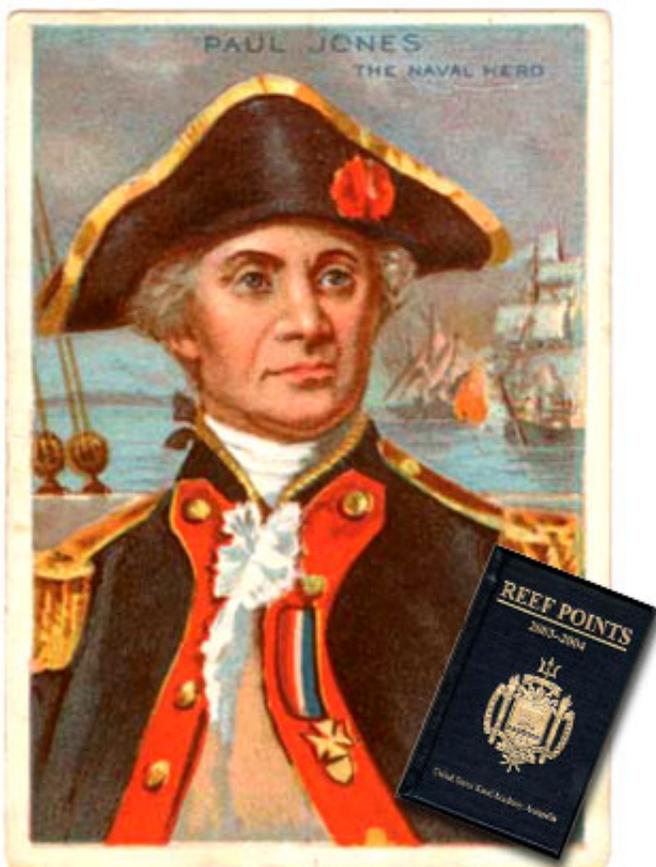
It is by no means enough that an officer of the Navy should be a capable mariner. He must be that, of course, but also a great deal more. He should be as well a gentleman of liberal education, refined manners, punctilious courtesy, and the nicest sense of personal honor.

He should be the soul of tact, patience, justice, firmness, kindness, and charity. No meritorious act of a subordinate should escape his attention or be left to pass without its reward, even if the reward is only a word of approval. Conversely, he should not be blind to a single fault in any subordinate, though at the same time, he should be quick and unflinching to distinguish error from malice, thoughtfulness from incompetency, and well meant shortcomings from heedless or stupid.

In one word, every commander should keep constantly before him the great truth, that to be well obeyed, he must be perfectly esteemed.

Written by Augustus C. Buell in 1900 to reflect his views of John Paul Jones (from *Reef Points*: 2003-2004, 98th Edition [Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Academy, 2003])

## The Best Quote Jones Never Wrote



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The "Qualifications of a Naval Officer" quotation variously attributed to John Paul Jones and force-fed to U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen in the publication *Reef Points* presents a clear sign of naval transformation at the turn of the 20th century. The action of a recent Commandant of Midshipmen, however, officially acknowledges that Jones had nothing to do with this 100-year-old mantra.

In 1986 naval historian James C. Bradford carefully constructed a case proving that Augustus C. Buell (1847-1904) was a fabricator. "Qualifications of a Naval Officer," long memorized by all midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy, was not written by John Paul Jones, as first cited by Buell in his 1900 two-volume *Paul Jones: Founder of the American Navy*.<sup>1</sup> Rather, Bradford convincingly argued in a 33-page pamphlet published by the Naval Historical

Foundation that the popular biographer had rewritten some of Jones's letters and created other documents to offer turn-of-the-century naval officers a model of modern professionalism.

The Academy's Nimitz Library cataloged numerous copies of Bradford's pamphlet, "The Reincarnation of John Paul Jones," and subsequent scholarly treatments of the naval hero lamented that Buell's fabrication continued to be taught to plebes every summer through the student handbook, *Reef Points*. But the Academy did not accurately attribute the quotation until 2003.

After a memo brought the issue to his attention, then-Commandant of Midshipmen Marine Corps Colonel John Allen considered the need for historical accuracy while also recognizing the positive impact the forged texts traditionally had played in the education of naval officers. The colonel's prudent solution was to retain the quote in the 98th edition of *Reef Points* while changing its attribution to read as follows: "Written by Augustus C. Buell in 1900 to reflect his views of John Paul Jones." Directly following this ascription are four authentic quotations by the Revolutionary War hero that now-Brigadier General Allen hopes will in time replace the forgery.

Whether this will end the controversy is debatable. Corporate memory is notoriously short, and heritage (or "collective memory" as the shared memories of a group or institution are known to scholars), once incorporated, is very difficult if not impossible to alter. Unless serious discussion accompanies the recent changes in *Reef Points*, Buell's fabrication likely will be reinstated at some later date. Past attempts by Academy officials to remove "Qualifications" from the curriculum failed when subsequent administrations, enamored by its effectiveness in building group cohesion, re-instituted the much beloved prose.

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