Bands across the tea

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Never mind Elvis, youth culture and Hip-Hop - here comes the USS Ranger.

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Countess Selkirk was none too happy with events, although she conceded that, considering the circumstances, everyone “really behaved very civilly”. Describing the visit as “by no means desirable”, she is unimpressed with the “vile blackguard look” of Cullam and categorises Jones as somebody who “deserved the gallows oftener than once”.

American War of Independence *Whitehaven* *St Marys Isle* *Scotland* *England* *USA* *Tea set* *Kircudbright* *Selkirk* *John Paul Jones* *Continental Navy* *Adventure* *Persons of Interest*

The negative influences associated with 'the special agreement' have been paraded in the media since the interests of The East India Trading Co. got chucked straight into Griffins Wharf. The ongoing dysfunctional relationship displayed between the political interests of the United Kingdom and those of the United States, have often disgraced the pages of broadsheets and tabloids alike. Generally speaking things fall short of actual conflict, however this was not always the case. Were it not for the brutal civil war waged between the two, the U.S.A would not be the economic juggernaut that it has become.

Turning the clock back to April 22 1778, the British population seems to have considered the American War of Independence in much the same way that 20th century Britons considered 'the troubles' in Eire. Basically an attitude of:

> Oh it's all quite terrible but it's hundreds of miles away, so it doesn't really concern us round here.

However, the actions of an aspiring old boy from nearby Kircudbright that fateful night, were to prove that hundreds (or even thousands) of miles are not any kind of indemnity against the consequences of complacency. At this point we introduce the leading antagonist, a one Captain John Paul Jones, originally of Kircudbright but now considered a darling of the New World. Capt. Jones had been put to sea as a young cabin boy and had returned as a scurrilous blaggard in command of an 8-gun sloop built in 1777 - the USS Ranger.

Capt. Jones appears to have had a bit of a chip on his shoulder regarding the disparity between his reinvented American persona and his British heritage. His antics in the New World had come to the attention of some serious movers, shakers and quakers. Benjamin Franklin himself was counted as one of Jones acquaintances despite Jones being wanted by the British for a fatal flogging some years prior. Nonetheless, Capt. Jones had some degree of patriotism remaining and this potentially doomed his invasion plans, well before he had ever set sail. His foolhardy transatlantic insurgency is the lesser known penultimate military invasion of the British Isles.



The precise details of the invasion have been subject to some literary license over the years. Undoubtedly due to the half baked, highly embarrassing antics that ensued. Accounts diverge in some fairly conspicuous ways. Some historians will claim that after the initial bungled raid on Whitehaven in Cumbria, the USS Ranger sailed north to Selkirk. A casual look at any map of the Scottish Borders reveals that sailing from Whitehaven to Selkirk would require something akin to a Chinook helicopter or at the very least an Ekranoplan or giant Hovercraft. More veracious accounts reveal that Capt. Jones sailed the

Ranger north across the Solway Firth to St Mary's Isle near Kircudbright. He drew on his local knowledge and planned to attack the family seat of Lord Selkirk. There are many entertaining accounts of what happened next. Basically the entire debacle boiled down to a colossal oversight by Capt. Jones and his band of salty sea dogs. If you're planning on abducting someone, you should probably make sure that you know where they are. Capt. Jones clearly did not have good intel on the whereabouts of the Fourth Earl of Selkirk. Furthermore the absent minded Jones seems to have erroneously assumed that his target would be waiting ashore having conveniently performed an inventory of all his good stuff and bound his own hands together.

Give us the dinner plates!

As it transpires, Dunbar Hamilton Douglas (Fourth Earl of Selkirk) was engaged with an essential duty synonymous with being a Laird in Scotland. Namely carousing through London with an abundant supply of cheap gin and expensive whores. Consequently the only authorised or appropriate individual in residence was the Lady Laird, Helen Dunbar Douglas, nee Hamilton. It seems that either the Selkirks were in fact cousins or the Scots aristocracy of the day used names as some form of bizarre encrypted messaging system. Apparently enjoying a period of confinement, the Lady Laird was somewhat displeased with the boorish ways of the attending invaders. Given that estate management would be her absentee husbands remit, all she could offer the uncouth colonial blaggards was a selection of household valuables. Again accounts vary, however it is broadly accepted that there was some silverware involved and that the good lady of the house insisted on obtaining a receipt. The exact details as to the constituent components are not consistent. Some of the tea set pieces were later returned by Capt. Jones and some were not. Apparently the teapot (or one very like it) remains on display in Kircudbright. The remnants have probably accounted for many provenance claims pertaining to pirate swag and antique silverware sales in the USA.

Despite having gone native in the New World, Captain Jones had not entirely abandoned his concept of honour. To invade your home country, sack a port town and kidnap a local dignitary is one thing, but to deprive the lady of the house of her dinner set is clearly nothing shy of downright barbarism. Several residents had recognised Jones during the raid on Whitehaven and thus his dreams of retirement back in good old blighty were dashed on the jagged rocks of 18th century doxing.

Fortunately Capt. John Paul Jones was no stranger to reinventing himself and subsequently went on to enjoy a high profile commission as the first mate of the Le' dZeppelin.