



Volume 20

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America's Revolution (73) – Gaspee Incident – III

Lead: In the 1700s the United States broke from England. No colony in history had done that before. This series examines America's Revolution.

Intro: *A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts*

Content: As a part of its efforts at collecting import taxes and in an effort to interdict smuggling in the waters in and adjacent to Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island, the British Navy dispatched a speedy

schooner to the region, HMS *Gaspee*. It was commanded by ambitious and aggressive Lieutenant Dudingston. The good captain was in hot pursuit of a suspected smuggler on June 2, 1772 when he ran his ship aground and was not able to lift it from the sand bar. Soon the ship was surrounded and boarded by locals who wounded the captain and took the whole crew prisoner. The fate of the *Gaspee* was sealed once the boarders had raided the Captain's cabin and had got the crew off. They set the ship on fire and put the crew on the shore.

Dudingston was later arrested by the Sheriff for his previous capture of colonial cargo and could only be released if the Navy paid a stiff fine for his behavior. The hapless former Captain of the *Gaspee* was packed off to London to answer stiff questioning at a courts-martial. The London government appointed a commission to examine the

Gaspee incident but it was unable to establish the guilt or even the identity of the perpetrators. The commission as a part of its charge had been given the right to send any accused persons back to England for trial. Though it sent no one back, the fact that it had such a power violated the ancient British right of trial by a jury of peers. Word of this extraordinary breach of primeval rights spread and soon newspapers were actively discussing the possibility if not the timing of American independence.

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