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From the Archives

Whose “Neck’s” Move?

In the events leading to the American Revolution, the people of Rhode Island Colony were no less agitated at the British than were their cousins in Boston and Williamsburg. In 1772 for instance, when the British Revenue Cutter *Gaspee* grounded near Providence, several longboats of Rhode Islanders, led by Abraham Whipple, burned it during the night. Three years later, Sir James Wallace, Captain of another British frigate, the *Rose*, near Newport, Rhode Island, finally learned the identity of the leader of the patriots who had torched the *Gaspee*. He then sent this letter to Whipple.

You, Abraham Whipple, on the 10th June, 1772, burned His Majesty’s vessel, the *Gaspee*, and I will hang you at the yard arm.

“James Wallace”

To this vow, Whipple replied in writing:

To Sir James Wallace:

Sir:—Always catch a man before you hang him.

“Abraham Whipple”

Whipple rose to the rank of commodore and had the distinction of firing the first American naval shots against the British in the Revolutionary War.

Source: Richard J. Sommers, ed., *Vignettes of Military History, Volume III* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army Military History Institute, February 1982), Vignette No. 125, contributed by Colonel James B. Agnew, USA Ret., drawn from Edwin Martin Stone, *Our French Allies...in the Great War of the American Revolution, From 1778 to 1782*.