From the Archives: Whose “Neck’s” Move?

Parameters Editors
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.