



The Burning of the HMS Gaspee

On January 21, 1771, Sultana's crew members searched a ship in Newport, Rhode Island. They soon found that one of the ship's crew members was a sailor named Thomas Roberts, who had deserted from Sultana two months earlier. Lieutenant John Inglis quickly ordered the ship to be seized, and Mr. Roberts was taken back aboard the schooner. Later that night, angry colonists rowed out to Sultana and threatened to cut the anchor line and burn the ship. Sultana's crew members loaded the swivel guns, muskets, and pistols to stand guard against the angry townspeople. Luckily, they managed to escape unharmed.



On June 9, 1772, another Royal Navy ship named the *HMS Gaspee* was not so lucky. While chasing down a merchant ship suspected of smuggling, the *Gaspee* sailed onto a sand bar and got stuck. Later that evening, eight small boats filled with angry colonists rowed out to the ship with torches in hand. After some words were exchanged, the colonists ordered the crew members off the boat, shot the commanding officer in the rear end, and burned the schooner to the water line. Many historians today view *The Gaspee Incident of 1772* as the first true act of war by the colonists against England! The citizens in Rhode Island were clearly not in favor of King George's policy of having the Royal Navy enforce British taxes in their harbors.

Soon after the *Gaspee* was destroyed, it was clear that Sultana was in great danger in the colonies. The schooner was simply too small to fight in battles, and the colonists were becoming more aggressive in their resistance to British authority. For these reasons, the Royal Navy decided to remove Sultana from North America and sail her back to England.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Read the text on the previous page, then answer the following questions in complete sentences. Write your answers on the lines provided.

1. Why did Lieutenant John Inglis have a ship seized in Rhode Island on January 21, 1771?

2. What happened to the *HMS Gaspee* on June 9, 1772?

3. Why do you think some historians consider *The Gaspee Incident of 1772* to be the colonists' first true act of war against England?

4. What are two reasons that King George and the Royal Navy decided to remove Sultana from the colonies and sail the schooner back to England?
