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***Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society: 1890-91*** (Providence: Snow & Farnham, 1891), pp. 80-92.

### **GASPEE DOCUMENTS.**

THE following copies of documents in the Public Record Office in London, relating to the affair of the Gaspee, were obtained by Prof. J. Franklin Jameson, in October, 1890, through the kindness of W. Noel Sainsbury, Esq., of that office: \*

[PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, NORTH AMERICA, ADMIRALS, 1771-77. O.] 1. Lieutenant Dudingston to Admiral Montagu.

. GASPEE, RHODE ISLAND,

24th March, SIR:

I came in here the 22nd, the same day received your letter of the 24th ult. relative to the Sloop, expected from Esequibo, and shall not fail to keep a good look out for her.

Enclosed is Copys of letters received from the Governor. I have given him all the satisfaction as to the establishment of the Schooner such as showing him my orders from the Admiralty and your first order to put myself under your command and a deputation from the Commissioners of the Customs, but would not any instructions or orders I have from you; This I did that they might not plead they were ignorant she belonged to the King, as they talked of fitting and arming a Vessel to prevent my carrying any seizure to Boston, two or three writs are now ready to be served on me on that account. Nor dare T send a boat on shore with safety, every invention of infamous lies calculated to inflame the Country is put in the News Papers. As I have done my duty strictly and in the most tender manner I fear not but I shall meet with your approbation. I shall return here in a fortnight to call for any orders as I have but 5 weeks provision on board, enclosed is the state and condition of His Majesty's Schooner.

I am,

Sir,

Yours &c.

W. DUDINGSTON. Admiral Montagu.

2. Admiral Montagu to Philip Stephens, Secretary to the Admiralty.

[EXTRACT.]

BOSTON, 12th June, 1772. SIR:

».....> • |

By Captain Squire of the Bonetta, I send these dispatches to inform their Lordships of the melancholy accident which has befallen the Gaspee Schooner un/3er the command of Lieut: Dudingston who was laying at single ancht<sup>^</sup>in Providence River in Rhode Island Government for the protection of the Trade, and to prevent smuggling and was attacked by a number of Boats full of armed men in the night (or morning) of the 10th June (as you will see by the enclosed deposition) and by force of arms took possession of her, having wounded her Commander with musquet ball in the Groin, and left Arm, of

which wounds he now lays so dangerously ill, that his recovery is exceedingly doubtful, they were not content with this vile piratical step, but also used the People ill by pinioning of them, and the tumbling them into the Boats and, sent them ashore in two divisions, after which they burnt the Schooner. The inclosed deposition will inform their Ld'ps more particularly to which I beg leave to refer them, and I shall wait their directions for my proceedings. I desire you will inform their Ld'ps that I have sent a Copy of the enclosed deposition to Governor Wanton of Rhode Island by Express and have prayed his assistance in apprehending and bringing the offenders to Justice, but as the Inhabitants of Rhode Island in general, are a set of lawless, piratical people, and whose whole business is that of smuggling and defrauding the King of his duties I cannot expect any satisfaction from that letter. I must beg leave to assure

their Lordships that Lieutenant Dudingston has always during my Command discharged his duty with the strongest marks which distinguishes the brave, diligent and good Officer, and if he recovers these wounds (which at present I am very doubtful of) I think myself in justice to his merit obliged to recommend him to their Lordships future favours.

[The deposition enclosed is that of William Dickinson, already printed in J. R. Bartlett's History of the Destruction of the Gaspee, pp. 30-32, and Staples' Documentary History, pp. 12-13.]

5. Admiral Montagu to the Secretary to the Admiralty.

[EXTRACT.]

BOSTON, 30th June, 1772. SIR:

By the Lydia Hall a Merchant ship bound to London, I transmit you duplicates of my dispatches by Captain Squire of the Bonetta, who sailed the 12th inst. I also herewith send you a copy of a letter which I have received from Lieut: Dudingston likewise an extract of a letter to the Commissioner of the Customs by which their Ld'ps will see with what severity these piratical people have used him.

In my hurry to dispatch the Bonetta, I had forgot to desire you would be pleased to move their Lordships to know if it is their pleasure that the Gaspee should be replaced by purchasing another Schooner.

[Dudingston's letter is here omitted, having been already printed in Bartlett, pp. 34-35, and in Staples, pp. 14-15.]

4. Admiral Montagu to the Secretary to the Admiralty.

[EXTRACT.]

BOSTON, 11th July, 1772. SIR:

You will be pleased to inform their Ld'ps that the 7th inst: in the evening I received an Express from Captain Linzee from Rhode Island, informing me he had discovered, and detained an indentured Black servant who was in one of the Boats that boarded the Gaspee Schooner, that one of the men now on board the Beaver (late of the Gaspee) remembered the man the moment he saw him. By return of the Express I wrote Governor Wanton, and inclosed him an account of what Captain Linzee had related, and a copy of the Negro man's deposition, and beg'd that he would exert himself as a principal Officer of the Crown, and use his utmost endeavour to cause the men mentioned in the Deposition inclosed to him to be apprehended that the King may have justice done for the insult shewn to his Flag by the piratical people of his Government. I have ordered the Negro to be kept prisoner and flatter myself I shall be able in a little time to inform their Lordships of some of the Ringleaders being taken if the Governor will assist me as he ought. I find by Governor Hutchinson that Potter is one of the principal persons of that Province, and that the other two are substantial people at Providence. Inclosed I transmit you a copy of the Deposition of the Negro man now in Custody on board the Swan.

[This deposition of Aaron Briggs is printed in Bartlett, pp. 41-42, and in Staples, p. 17.]

5. Admiral Montagu to the Secretary to the Admiralty.

[EXTRACT.]

BOSTON, 2nd Sepr. 1772. SIR:

I have sent Lieutenant Dudiugston home to be tried, not having ships sufficient to assemble a Court Martial. I must beg leave to recommend him to their Lordships, and doubt not but they will take his unhappy state into consideration. He is deprived of the use of one arm, and has now a ball in his thigh, besides which he lost everything he was worth in the world except the shirt he had on his back together with his books and papers relative to the Schooner, and from the time of the Schooners being burnt to his being removed on board the Beaver the expense to his Doctors &c are more than he is able to support and which I hope their Lordships will be pleased to allow him. . . . .

You will be pleased to acquaint their Ld'ps I have used every method in my power to apprehend the people concerned in burning the Gaspee, but to no effect, or do I see any probability of ever doing it from any assistance I may receive from Governor Wanton. Inclosed I send you a letter from Mr. Dudley Collector at Rhode Island and leave their Lordships to make what use of it they please.

6. Charles Dudley to Admiral Montagu..

[EXTRACT.]

RHODE ISLAND, 23rd July 1772.

I shall first of all premise that the attack upon the Gaspee was not the effect of sudden passion and resentment, but of cool deliberation and forethought; her local circumstances at the time she was burnt did not raise the first motive to that enormous Act; it had been long determin'd she should be destroyed.

The paragraph in the inclosed News Paper under the Newport head, was the prelude to the diabolical scene which follow'd. I dare appeal to every candid man in this country if he did not see it in that light. The next public step was "a Memorial or Petition from the Merchants in Providence first laid before the Superior Court of Judicature then sitting in that Town, and afterwards before 'the Governor, praying that the Commander of an armed Vessell then cruising in the Bay should be called upon by the Civil Authority to know by what power he was authorized to search ships and other Vessells on the high seas, tho' it was notorious that the arm'd Vessell in question sailed under British Colours and belonged to His Britannic Majesty: what followed in consequence of this "Memorial I shall forbear to mention, as I have understood that whole transaction has been already canvassed between you and the Chief Magistrate.

These in my humble opinion are the two grand points on which a discovery must turn corroborating evidence of respectable men will not be wanting, to prove that this insult on His Majesty's Crown and Dignity was begun in the most public and open manner nor will you want good testimony to show, that the intention was spoke of many days before the Event.

If Admiral Montagu will interest himself in promoting an enquiry into these things, not under the influence of a Governor and Company of Rhode Island, but under the high authority of a British Senate: I will be bold to say that the destroyers of the Gaspee and the barbarous assassins of Lieut. Duddingston will be brought to light. Let the Printer of the Neuport Mercury be called to account for the paragraph I have herein pointed at; let the Governor be required to lay before His Majesty's Secretary of State all Papers, Memorials or Petitions relating to the Schooner Gaspee, and you will no longer have doubts of what I have said before in this letter, that the Government of Rhode Island bears no resemblance to any other Government under the Crown of England.

I am with very great respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient

humble servant

CHAS. DUDLEY.

[A part of this has been printed in Bartlett's Documents, p. 40, where is also given a paragraph not contained in the above, relating to an article in the Newport Mercury of February 24th.]

[PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, COURT MARTIALS, No. 46.] 7. At a Court Martial Assembled on board His Majesty's Ship Centaur in Portsmouth Harbour on the fourteenth day of October 1772.

Present

Captain EDWARD JEKTLL President.

Capt. RICH : HUGHES Junr. Capt. THOS. COLLINGWOOD

JOHN WHEELOCK GEORGE BALFOUR

JOHN BENTINCK RICHARD KING

CHARLES DOUGLAS HENRY DAVIS.

The Court pursuant to an Order from the Right honble Lords Comissioners of the Admiralty dated the seventh day of October instant directed to Captain Edward Jekyll Commander of His Majesty's ship Egmont and now senior Captain. of His Majesty's ships and Vessels at Portsmouth proceeded to enquire into the loss of His Majesty's Schooner Gaspee in Providence River Rhode Island on the 10th day of June last and to try Lieut. Dudin<sup>o</sup>rston together with such of the Officers and People as belonged to her at the time and are returned to England in His Majesty's Sloop Beaver for their conduct upon that occasion, and having heard the witnesses examined and finished the enquiry and maturely and deliberately weighed and considered the whole the Court is of opinion that the Schooner was seized in the night time by a number of armed men in Boats who burnt her, that Lieut: Dudingston and the Officers and People belonging to her did their duty in opposing the seizure to the utmost of their power on so short a notice. The Court doth therefore adjudge them to be honourably acquitted and they are hereby so acquitted accordingly.

EDWD. JEKYLL R. HUGHES JUNR. THOS. COLLING WOOD JOHN WHEELOCK GEO: BALFOUR J. BENTINCK R. KING CHS. DOUGLAS HEN: DAVIS. THOS. BINSTEED Deputy Judge Advocate.

8. Minutes of a Court Martial assembled on Board His Majesty's ship Centaur in Portsmouth Harbour on the fourteenth day of October 1772.

Present

Captain EDWARD JEKYLL President

Captn. RICHARD HUGHES Junr. Captn. THOS. COLLINGWOOD

JOHN WHEELOCK GEORGE BALFOUR

JOHN BENTINCK RICHARD KING

CHARLES DOUGLAS HENRY DAVIS.

Appeared

WM. DUDDINGSTON Lieut: and Commander of His Majesty's late Schooner Gaspee.

WM. DICKINSON—Midshipman.

JOHN JOHNSON—Boatswain's Mate.

THOMAS PARR, EDW. PULLIBECK and BARTW. CHIVERS Seamen.

Audience admitted.

The Order of the Right honble Lords Comissioners of the Admiralty dated the seventh day of October instant directed to Captain Edward Jekyll Commander of His Majesty's ship Egmont and now senior Captain of His Majesty's ships and Vessells at Portsmouth for assembling a Court Martial to enquire into the loss of His Majesty's ship Gaspee in Providence River Rhode Island on the tenth day of June last, and to try Lieutenant Dudingston together with such of the Officers and People who belonged to her at the time and are returned to England in His Majesty's Sloop Beaver, for their conduct upon that occasion was read.

The members of the Court and Deputy Judge Advocate, then in open Court and before they proceeded to trial, respectively took the several oaths enjoined and directed by an Act of Parliament made and passed in the twenty second year of the reign of our late Sovereign Lord George the second entitled "An Act for amending, explaining and reducing into one Act of Parliament the Laws relating to the Government of his Majesty's Ships, Vessells and Forces by Sea." Lieut: Dndingston was then acquainted by the Court that it was incumbent on him to answer to the Court for the loss of His Majesty's Schooner the Gaspee under his command. On which he delivered in a narrative marked with the letter A\* which was read, and is hereto annexed.

He then desired that Bartholomew Chivers and Mr. Dickinson might be sworn to support the narrative.

BARTHOLOMEW CHIVERS, SEAMAN, SWORN.

Q. Was you Centinel on the Quarter Deck when the Gaspee was lost?

A. I was.

See post. No. 9.

Q. At what hour?

A. Three quarters after twelve at night.

Q. Eelate the circumstances to the Court.

A. I saw four or five Boats coming from the Shore. I hailed them but had no answer, I tried to fire but the Musquet snapt six or seven times. I acquainted the Captain and Midshipman of it, I took the People at first for rocks the Captain came on Deck in his shirt he went forward to the Starboard side fore chains. I hailed them again

they answered G—d d n your blood we have you now. The

Schooner was aground they came alongside the Captain called for matches but could get none, he called for Arms but the Arm Chest was lockt, the Captain ordered all hands to be called the Captain ordered the Boats to keep off, and kept striking with his Hanger to keep them off, and he threatened to fire into them, they cursed and swore they would come on board, they then fired a musquet at the Captain and wounded him, the Captain went off, the people from the Boats got into the Vessell so fast as they could, they told the People

they should not come up the Skuttle, they then said d n them let

them come up, and we will do for them, they drove them down the Hatchway and took possession of the Vessel, swore they would burn the Schooner and put us all to death, they ordered the Crew up one by

one and pinioned them, put us into the Boat and carried us ashore, they released me to assist the Captain.

Q. How many Boats?

A. There were many boats, about five or six boats, they said about eight or nine.

Q. How many men?

A. About two hundred.

Q. How many had you on board?

A. About nineteen persons, the Master and four men were gone on duty to Boston with a Vessel which we had seized.

WILLIAM DICKINSON, MIDSHIPMAN, SWORN.

Q. Relate what you know of the loss of the Gaspee Schooner.

A. About half past twelve on the eleventh of June the Centinal came down and made an alarm that there were a number of boats coming down the river. Mr. Dudingston was going in his shirt on Deck, I was close to him he told me to go back and get the Keys of the Arm Chest which were in the Cabin, I went on Deck, opened the Chest, and threw some Arms on Deck, I took up one and fired it, the boats were then about forty or fifty yards from the Quarter Deck, I went forward and saw Mr. Dudingston striking a person coming into the Chains with his Hanger, there were pistols fired from us, I don't know how many, the fire was not returned from the Boats, and Mr. Dickinson [Dudingston] was shot, they then came on board us, and I saw them beating two of our People down the Skuttle, Mr. Dickinson [Dudingston] went aft, and I stood by him, our other People were driven down.

Then the witness referred for what passed on the Deck to the deposition taken before Governor Hutchinson accompanying the Order.

Q. How many were on Deck at the time of their boarding?

A. Six.

Q. How long was it between your first seeing them to the time of their boarding her?

A. Not quite three minutes.

Q. Were any wounded in the Boats?

A. I don't know.

Mr. Dudingston acquainted the Court that he was informed that one of the People in the Boats was privately buried ashore.

Court asked.

Q. Do you apprehend every measure was pursued that could be on so short a notice for the preservation of His Majesty's Schooner?

A. Yes.

Q. Was you tied as the others were?

A. Yes and thrown into the Boat and afterwards on the Captain's wanting to see me they released me.

Q. Did they set her on fire?

A. Yes I waited on shore till I saw her on fire.

Q. Were you released on the shore?

A. Yes.

Q. How many people do you think boarded her?

A. About one hundred and fifty in seven Boats wch. I counted in Launches and Merchants ships boats.

Q. Had you any fire on board?

A. None but candles they struck a light an hour and a half before I left her.

Q. How many persons were there on board of the Schooner's complement?

A. About nineteen.

Mr. Dudingston acquainted the Court that the reason of his sending for Mr. Dickinson and Chivers down into the Cabbins was that they might take particular notice of the People's features who were there.

CAPT. JOHN LINZEE, LATE OF His MAJESTY'S SLOOP BEAVER,

SWORN.

Mr. Dudingston asked.

Q. You know the spot where the Gaspee was destroyed and as I had only left you a few hours could you suppose I could possibly have the least' reason to apprehend an attack from the shore in the manner I did being so far from the shore?

A. I am of opinion there was no reason to apprehend any attack as she lay four miles from any principal Town.

Court asked.

Mr. Dudingston have you any objection to the conduct of the Officers or People?

A. None, they would have done their duty had they had their cloaths on.

The same question was put to the People as to the Captain's conduct.

A. He did his utmost.

The Court was cleared.

The Court agreed that the Schooner was seized in the night by a number of armed men in boats, that Mr. Dudingston and the rest .of the Officers and People belonging to her did their duty in opposing the seizure to the utmost of their power on so short a notice and that they should be honourably acquitted.

The Court was opened and Sentence passed accordingly.

THOS. BINSTEED,

Deputy Judge Advocate.

[PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, NORTH AMERICA, ADMIRALS, 1771-77. O. —THIS PAPER is BOUND UP WITH ADMIRAL MONTAGU'S LETTER OF JUNE 30, 1772.]

9. Narrative Marked With the Letter A.

On Wednesday morning June 10th 1772, about 1 o'clock, as His Majesty's Schooner Gaspee under my command, was laying aground on a spit of sand called Nanquid, about nine miles below Providence in the Government of Rhode Island—the sentinal on the Quarter deck called to the Midshipman that he saw several boats rowing towards the Schooner. Upon my hearing the Sentinal call out I came on deck, ordered all hands to be called immediately, I hail'd the Boats and forbid them coming nearer the Vessel or I should order them to be fired on—they answered they had the Sheriff with them and must come on board—I answered that the Sheriff could not be admitted on board at that unseasonable hour and repeated to them again to keep off, upon which they hollow'd and rowed towards the Schooner's bows. I then ordered the Sentinal to fire and was using every means in my power to get the people upon deck, ordered the Midshipman to get the small Arms out of the Arm Chest ready for the men as they came up, but finding they did not come so readily as I could wish I went to the Hatchway to hurry them telling them they should not mind putting on their clothes but come up as they were. I then look'd forward and saw a Boat laying the Vessel on board on the Stitrbow. I step'd forward and saw a man endeavouring to get up by the fore Shrouds. I made a cut at him with my sword, and he fell back into the boat. At that instant I received a shot through my left arm, which broke it, and another in my Groin. I then with difficulty, returned to the Quarter deck, which I found full of men, they having boarded the Vessel on the Quarter—immediately on my getting there I was surrounded, knocked down, and told to beg my life, and to order the people to surrender. As I saw no possibility of defending the Vessel against such numbers, judging them to be about one hundred and fifty armed and commanded with regularity by one who personated the Sheriff—I thought it prudent to propose to them that the people should surrender if they would use them like men, who had only been doing their duty—On their promising that they would; I called out to the Midshipman and people, to make no further resistance—They then forced all the Schooner's Crew into the Hold, and ordered them on Deck again singly, unarmed, tied their hands behind their backs, and put them into boats, this took up some time, during which, I repeatedly desired they would allow my wounds to be dressed, as I found I had lost much blood—They damned me for a scoundrel and said I was not wounded, but after consulting with one another for sometime and observing much blood on the Deck," they consented to it and allowed my servant to be untied and to assist me down to my Cabbin—they call'd for the Surgeon of the Schooner, I answered I had no Surgeon on board, and requested they would allow me to go on shore—to which they would not consent but told me they could find a Surgeon for me and immediately two men came down and got everything necessary for stopping the blood and dressing my wound. When that was completed, they carried me on Deck almost naked, put me into a Boat which was already mann'd and armed, and ordered the person who commanded the Boat to land me on the Beach, where they left me with four of the Schooner's men, before I got half way from the Vessel to the Shore, I heard several guns go off, and on turning round saw the Schooner afire, and was soon after informed by the Midshipman who was landed in another boat, that she was entirely destroyed. I then directed the Midshipman to collect the people and keep them together if possible till an opportunity offered to send them on board the Beaver.