

2010 Gaspee Days Essay Contest First Prize

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They burned it! Rhode Island's patriots burned the Gaspee in the year 1772. The Gaspee was a British ship that patrolled the coast of Rhode Island and was sent to Rhode Island to stop the smuggling of goods. The reason why smuggling became a problem was because the British taxed goods that Rhode Islanders were not used to being taxed. Rhode Islanders did not take too kindly to the presence of the Gaspee because the crew stole from farmers and stopped boats to search for smuggled goods. On some occasions, they even seized the boats and took them into British use. They also threatened to assault the men on the ships.

As a result to the Gaspee patrolling in Rhode Island's waters, the patriots revolted. There was a chase with an American ship called Hannah and the Gaspee. The chase erupted when Hannah left Newport for Providence and was stopped by the Gaspee. The captain of the Gaspee demanded that the Hannah be searched and the Hannah's crew refused and took off with the Gaspee following. The ships soon reached Namquid Point, off the coast of Warwick, Rhode Island, where the sandbar was covered by the high tide in. The Hannah did not have any cargo on board and they were able to ease right over the sandbar. The Gaspee, however, did not make it over and became stuck. Then, the crews of both ships argued. Eventually, the Hannah went to Providence to report the status and location of the Gaspee to an American patriot by the name of John Brown. When John Brown learned of the situation, he gathered his ship captains and they got together several longboats. Brown also sent a drummer around Providence to recruit more people to join a raid on the Gaspee. All the participants of the raid joined together to plan the attack. There were about eight longboats full of eight patriots each. The patriots camouflaged their faces by blackening them, so as not to be seen at night.

They arrived at Namquid Point at around one in the morning and the Gaspee spotted the approaching boats and called the alarm. One of the patriots told the Gaspee's crew that they were there to arrest the captain of the ship, which was a lie to make the Gaspee's crew comply. Members of the Gaspee's crew in turn opened fire on the patriots. Then, the patriots fired back and the captain of the Gaspee was shot in the arm. The patriots captured everybody on the Gaspee with no fatalities. The men were held overnight and released in the morning. Some patriots went through the papers and other belongings that were on the Gaspee and then early the next morning, they burned the Gaspee and left. The Gaspee exploded because the fire reached the gunpowder and the ship tore apart.

When the patriots returned to Providence, they decided it was best for them to stay quiet about what happened. Rhode Islanders actually pretended to be angered by the burning of the Gaspee. They even set out a fake reward for the suspects so the British could not point the finger at them. The British were able to charge suspects, but they held the trial in Great Britain so the defense of the suspects was next to impossible.

The burning of the Gaspee was actually a stepping stone towards all of the colonies joining together to revolt and ultimately form the United States of America. The burning of the Gaspee is still important to Rhode Islanders because it marks a historic turn in history. Rhode Islanders still celebrate the burning of the Gaspee every year because we would not be who we are today if this event had not happened. The American Revolution was a result to the burning of the hated ship and the American Revolution gave Americans their independence, which they

still have today. Some Americans feel that they owe thanks to the patriots that burned the Gaspee and they host events to pay tribute. The burning of the Gaspee was a blessing in disguise.