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Letter from Lieutenant Dudingston to Governor Wanton, March 1772

Instead of appearing in person as Governor Wanton requested, Lieutenant Dudingston, captain of HMS Gaspee, sends a letter describing his orders and questioning a colonial governor's authority to require anything of a commander of "His Majesty's Vessels."

Gaspee, Rhode Island March 23, 1772

Sir

Last night, I received your letter informing me that a number of the inhabitants of this Colony had complained to you of my having in a most illegal and unwarrantable manner interrupted their trade by searching and detaining every little packet boat, plying between the several towns.

In answer to which, I have done nothing but what was my duty, and their complaint can only be founded on their ignorance of that. When I waited on you, on my arrival, I acquainted you of my being sent to this government to assist the revenue & had my commission to show you if required, as it was ever understood by all His Majesty's Governors I have had the honor to wait on, that every officer commanding one of His Majesty's Vessels were properly authorized and never did produce it, unasked for. The officer I send is equally qualified & has been in the boats at boarding most of the vessels & can give any information relative to my proceeding.

Sir

Your humble servant,

W. Dudingston

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