

How Henry Knox Helped Save Boston

On April 19, 1775 at the beginning of the American Revolution, the British captured the city of Boston, and it was not liberated until March of 1776. It was retaken largely due to the unlikely plan of a young Bostonian by the name of Henry Knox.

Henry Knox was a bookseller before the war. He was a voracious reader and his favorite material was military textbooks (Clark 238). His father disappeared when Henry was nine, forcing him to find work to help support his mother (McCullough 58).

In November of 1775, General Washington wanted to place cannons on the Dorchester Heights above Boston, but none were located nearby (Lancaster 116). Henry Knox, by then a 22-year-old in charge of the colonial artillery outside Boston, proposed to General Washington his plan to drag 55 large guns 300 miles from the recently captured Fort Ticonderoga in the middle of winter. Many people thought that this was impossible (McCullough 59). Nevertheless, General Washington gave him permission to execute his plan.

Knox left the rebel fortifications outside of Boston on November 18, 1775, and arrived at Fort Ticonderoga on December 5. On December 9, Knox set sail on nearby Lake George with 55 guns loaded on three ships, weighing in total around 120,000 pounds. During the first hour of the voyage they had a good wind behind them. But the wind turned for the rest of the trip, forcing Knox and his men to row into the wind. One of the ships sank and had to be bailed out and fixed. Over eight grueling days, they traveled about 40 miles down Lake George (McCullough 82-83).

Knox had already arranged for sleds to be purchased, built, or rented at the southern end of the lake. He and his men then used those sleds and 80 oxen to drag the cannons cross country through rugged terrain. Knox had been counting on the ground to be snow and ice covered,

making the use of sleds feasible. Unfortunately, the surrounding area experienced several thaws which melted the necessary snow and ice (Lancaster 111). The ice on the rivers which they had planned to drag the cannons across was too thin. The caravan of cannons had to wait at Fort George for the weather to grow colder. But when the weather finally changed, a storm dumped three feet of snow starting on Christmas. The cannons were drug laboriously across the snow covered yet thawing terrain. Knox went ahead of the cannons to drill holes in the river ice to thicken it (McCullough 83-84). The water coming up from the holes would freeze on the surface to thicken the ice gradually. Despite his efforts, one cannon fell through the ice. He managed to rescue it and continue on towards Boston.

All 55 cannons survived the journey to Boston. They arrived on January 25 and were set up with fortifications on the night of March 4 (McCullough 85). The British were completely surprised by the arrival of the guns and the speed at which the fortifications were erected. After trying unsuccessfully to fire on the elevated hill, the British abandoned the city (McCullough 93-94).

Henry Knox risked his life and reputation on a plan that many thought was impossible. He had an idea and then backed it up with action. This selfless event was not only a catalyst for the rest of the American Revolution, but also for the rest of Henry Knox's military service.

497 words, excluding "the," "a," and citations.

Work Cited

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