

= Noble train of artillery =

The noble train of artillery , also known as the Knox Expedition , was an expedition led by Continental Army Colonel Henry Knox to transport heavy weaponry that had been captured at Fort Ticonderoga to the Continental Army camps outside Boston , Massachusetts during the winter of 1775 ? 1776 .

Knox went to Ticonderoga in November 1775 , and , over the course of three winter months , moved 60 tons of cannons and other armaments by boat , horse and ox @-@ drawn sledges , and manpower , along poor @-@ quality roads , across two semi @-@ frozen rivers , and through the forests and swamps of the lightly inhabited Berkshires to the Boston area . Historian Victor Brooks has called Knox 's exploit " one of the most stupendous feats of logistics " of the entire American Revolutionary War .

The route by which Knox moved the weaponry is now known as the Henry Knox Trail , and the states of New York and Massachusetts have erected markers along the route .

= = Background = =

Shortly after the American Revolutionary War broke out with the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 , Benedict Arnold , a militia leader from Connecticut who had arrived with his unit in support of the Siege of Boston , proposed to the Massachusetts Committee of Safety that Fort Ticonderoga , on Lake Champlain in the Province of New York , be captured from its small British garrison . One reason he gave to justify the move was the presence at Ticonderoga of heavy weaponry . On May 3 , the committee gave Arnold a Massachusetts colonel 's commission and authorized the operation .

The idea to capture Ticonderoga had also been raised to Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys in the disputed New Hampshire Grants territory ( present @-@ day Vermont ) . Allen and Arnold joined forces , and on May 10 a force of 83 men captured the fort without a fight . The next day , a detachment of men captured the nearby Fort Crown Point , again without combat .

Arnold began to inventory the two forts for usable military equipment . Hampered by a lack of resources and conflict over command of the forts , first with Allen , and later with a Connecticut militia company sent to hold the fort in June , Arnold eventually abandoned the idea of transporting the armaments to Boston and resigned his commission .

= = Expedition planning = =

In July 1775 , George Washington assumed command of the forces outside Boston . One of the significant problems he identified in the nascent Continental Army there was a lack of heavy weaponry , which made offensive operations virtually impossible . While it is uncertain exactly who proposed the operation to retrieve the Ticonderoga cannons ( biographers tend to credit either Knox or Arnold with giving Washington the idea ) , Washington eventually chose the young Henry Knox for the job .

Knox , a 25 @-@ year @-@ old bookseller with an interest in military matters , served in the Massachusetts militia , and became good friends with Washington on his arrival at Boston . When Washington gave Knox the assignment , he wrote that " no trouble or expense must be spared to obtain them . " On November 16 Washington , issued orders to Knox to retrieve the cannons ( and authorized £ 1000 for the purpose ) , and wrote to General Philip Schuyler asking him to assist Knox in the endeavor . Washington 's call for the weapons was echoed by the Second Continental Congress , which issued Knox a colonel 's commission in November , which did not reach him until he returned from the expedition .

Knox departed Washington 's camp on November 17 , and after traveling to New York City for supplies , reached Ticonderoga on December 5 . The night before , at Fort George at the southern end of Lake George , he shared a cabin with a young British prisoner named John André . André had been taken prisoner during the Siege of Fort St. Jean and was on his way south to a prison

camp . The two were of a similar age and temperament , and found much common ground to talk about . It was not to be their last meeting ; the next time they met , Knox presided over the court martial that convicted and sentenced André to death for his role in Benedict Arnold 's treason .

= = Albany = =

Upon arrival at Ticonderoga , Knox immediately set about identifying the equipment to take and organizing its transport . He selected 59 pieces of equipment , including cannons ranging in size from four to twenty @-@ four pounders , mortars , and howitzers . He estimated the total weight to be transported at 119 @,@ 000 pounds ( about 60 tons or 54 metric tons ) . The largest pieces , the twenty @-@ four pounder " Big Berthas " , were 11 feet ( 3 @.@ 4 m ) long and estimated to weigh over 5 @,@ 000 pounds ( 2 @,@ 300 kg ) .

The equipment was first carried overland from Ticonderoga to the northern end of Lake George , where most of the train was loaded onto a scow @-@ like ship called a gundalow . On December 6 , the gundalow set sail for the southern end of the lake , with Knox sailing ahead in a small boat . Ice was already beginning to cover the lake , but the gundalow , after grounding once on a submerged rock , reached Sabbath Day Point . The next day , they sailed on , again with Knox going ahead . While he reached Fort George in good time , the gundalow did not appear when expected . A boat sent to check on its progress reported that the gundalow had foundered and sunk not far from Sabbath Day Point . While this at first appeared to be a serious setback , Knox 's brother William , captain of the gundalow , reported that she had foundered , but that her gunnels were above the water line , and that she could be bailed out . This was done , the ship was refloated , and two days later , the gundalow arrived at the southern end of the lake .

On December 17 , Knox wrote to Washington that he had built " 42 exceeding strong sleds , and have provided 80 yoke of oxen to drag them as far as Springfield " , and that he hoped " in 16 or 17 days to be able to present your Excellency a noble train of artillery " .

Knox then set out for Albany ahead of the train . At Glens Falls , he crossed the frozen Hudson River and proceeded on through Saratoga , reaching New City ( present @-@ day Lansingburg ) , just north of Albany , on Christmas Day . Two feet ( 0 @.@ 6 m ) of snow fell that day , slowing his progress , as the snow @-@ covered route needed to be broken open . The next day , again slowed by significant snow on the ground , he finally reached Albany . There , he met with General Philip Schuyler , and the two of them worked over the next few days to locate and send north equipment and personnel to assist in moving the train south from Lake George . While the snowfall was sufficient for the use of sleds to move the train overland , the river ice was still too thin to move it over the Hudson . Knox and his men tried to accelerate the process of thickening the river ice by pouring additional water on top of existing ice . By January 4 , the first of the cannon had arrived at Albany . On the way to Albany , and again on crossing the Hudson heading east from there toward Massachusetts , cannons crashed through the ice into the river . In every instance , the cannon was recovered . On January 9 , the last of cannons had crossed the Hudson , and Knox rode ahead to oversee the next stage of the journey .

= = Crossing the Berkshires = =

Details of the remaining journey are sketchy , as Knox 's journal ends on January 12 . He reached the vicinity of Claverack , New York , on January 9 , and proceeded through the Berkshires , reaching Blandford , Massachusetts , two days later . There , the lead crew refused to continue owing to a lack of snow and the upcoming steep descent to the Connecticut River valley . Knox hired additional oxen and persuaded the crew to go on . As the train moved further east , news of it spread , and people came out to watch it pass . In Westfield , Knox loaded one of the big guns with powder and fired it , to the applause of the assembled crowd .

At Springfield , Knox had to hire new work crews , as his New York @-@ based crews wanted to return home . John Adams reported seeing the artillery train pass through Framingham on January 25 . Two days later , Knox arrived in Cambridge and personally reported to Washington that the

artillery train had arrived . According to Knox 's accounting , he spent £ 521 on an operation he had hoped would take two weeks , that instead took ten weeks .

= = Arrival = =

When the equipment began to arrive in the Boston area , Washington , seeking to end the siege , formulated a plan to draw at least some of the British out of Boston , at which point he would launch an attack on the city across the Charles River . Pursuing this plan , he placed cannons from Ticonderoga at Lechmere 's Point and Cobble Hill in Cambridge , and on Lamb 's Dam in Roxbury . These batteries opened fire on Boston on the night of March 2 , while preparations were made to fortify the Dorchester Heights , from which cannons could threaten both the city and the British fleet in the harbor . On the night of March 4 , Continental Army troops occupied this high ground .

British General William Howe first planned to contest this move by assaulting the position , but a snowstorm prevented its execution . After further consideration , he decided instead to withdraw from the city . On March 17 , British troops and Loyalist colonists boarded ships and sailed for Halifax , Nova Scotia .

Henry Knox went on to become the chief artillery officer of the Continental Army , and later served as the first United States Secretary of War .

= = Legacy = =

To commemorate Knox 's achievement , at the time of its sesquicentennial ( 150th anniversary ) , the states of New York and Massachusetts both placed historical markers along the route he was believed to have taken at the time . In 1972 , markers in New York were moved when new information surfaced about the train 's movements between Albany and the state boundary . Most of the markers in Massachusetts are along a route the train was assumed to take , given the sparsity of documentation and what was known about roads in Massachusetts at the time .

Fort Knox , an Army post in Kentucky most famous for being the site of the United States Bullion Depository , was named after Henry Knox .