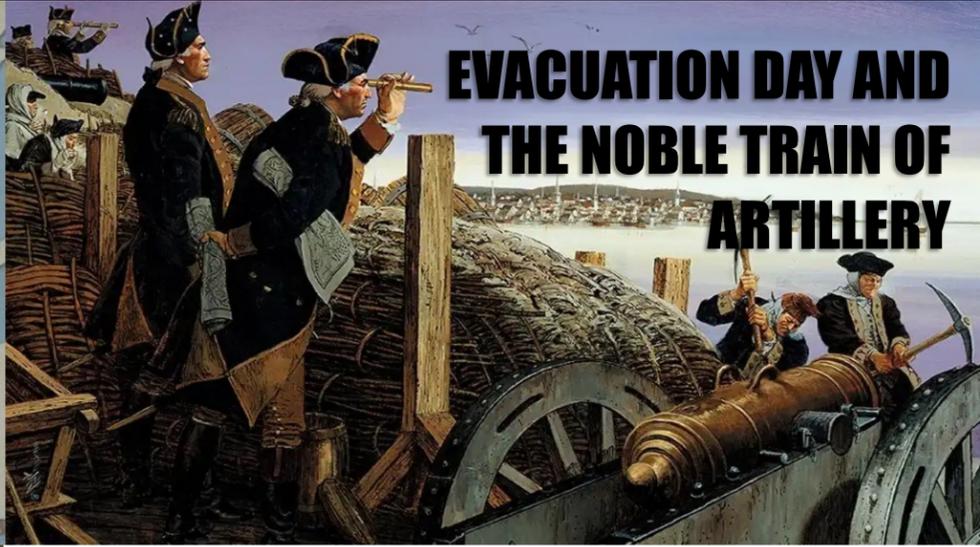




U.S. ARMY



EVACUATION DAY AND THE NOBLE TRAIN OF ARTILLERY

THE NOBLE TRAIN: A FOUNDING STORY OF ARMY LOGISTICS

As the United States approaches its 250th birthday, it's a time to reflect on the origins of our nation and our Army. While tales of battlefield bravery are well known, some of the most critical victories of the American Revolution were won through incredible feats of logistics. The British evacuation of Boston on 17 March 1776, the Continental Army's first major strategic victory was made possible not by a single battle, but by a logistical miracle known as the "Noble Train of Artillery."

Following the opening shots of the war at Lexington and Concord, the colonial militia had the British army trapped in Boston. However, it was a frustrating stalemate. Under the command of General William Howe, the British were comfortably resupplied by the Royal Navy. The newly formed Continental Army, led by General George Washington, lacked the heavy cannons needed to dislodge the British from their fortifications or challenge their fleet. The firepower Washington desperately needed was sitting 300 miles away at the recently captured Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York.

The monumental task of retrieving these weapons fell to Colonel Henry Knox, a 25-year-old former Boston bookseller with a passion for military history and engineering. After impressing Washington with his technical knowledge, Knox was given his orders: bring the cannons to Boston, sparing "no trouble or expense."

In December 1775, Knox selected 59 pieces of ordnance, including massive 24-pounder cannons, with a total estimated weight of nearly 60 tons. The expedition began with a near-disaster when a boat carrying the heaviest guns sank in the shallow, icy waters of Lake George. In a remarkable display of field recovery, Knox's men managed to refloat the vessel and save the precious cargo.

Once on land, the true test began. Knox's plan relied on winter, and he had 42 "exceeding strong sleds" built to be pulled by teams of horses across the snow and ice. The journey was fraught with peril. When crossing the semi-frozen Hudson River, cannons repeatedly crashed through the ice. Each time, they were painstakingly recovered. In a brilliant act of field engineering, Knox ordered his men to pour water onto the ice to thicken it overnight, creating a stronger surface for the immense weight.

The most grueling phase was hauling the 60-ton train over the steep, rough tracks of the Berkshire Mountains. Knox himself wrote that it seemed "almost a miracle that people with heavy loads should be able to get up & down such hills." The support of local farmers and laborers proved critical, as they helped haul the guns up the steepest slopes and provided fresh animals.

After a brutal 56-day journey, the "noble train of artillery" arrived outside Boston on January 25, 1776. Washington wasted no time. On the night of 4 March, his troops stealthily fortified Dorchester Heights, placing the newly arrived cannons in a commanding position over the city and the British fleet. General Howe, seeing his position was now indefensible, had no choice but to withdraw. On 17 March 1776, the British evacuated Boston.

Hailed as "one of the most stupendous feats of logistics" of the war, the Knox Expedition remains a masterclass in operational planning, improvisation, and resilience. It serves as a powerful lesson in the US Army excellence in logistics.

From 1775 to 1778, LT Hodgkins from Ipswich, Massachusetts wrote 86 letters to his wife Sarah Perkins detailing the conditions and providing updates from the front. He would serve in several battles in the war before returning home in 1779.

18 March 1776

My dear, I wrote a letter yesterday morning, and soon after I wrote there appeared a great movement among the enemy, and we soon found that they had left Bunker Hill & Boston, and all gone on board the shipping & our army took possession of Bunker Hill and also of Boston, but none went to Boston but those that have had the small pox. Brother can inform you of matters better than I can by writing. All I can say is that we must move somewhere very soon, but I would not have you make yourself uneasy about that, for our enemy seems to be fleeing before us, which seems to give a spring to our spirits. I must conclude as before by subscribing, Joseph Hodgkins



1. Although the battle of Bunker Hill is famous, where was the battle actually fought?
2. What was the "Shot heard round the world?"
3. Upon seeing his situation in Boston, General Howe and the British had no choice but to evacuate soldiers and loyalist to what location?

MARCH TRIVIA

FEBRUARY'S ANSWERS

1. What was the first American-fought war where counterintelligence or deception tactics were used?
The Revolutionary War
2. How many men were (actually) in Bradley's Phantom Army?
1,100
3. Should you run after someone who stole your cell phone while you were out at a café?
Jeff says, "no." - Almost all of you said "yes" though.



THERE'S MORE TO THIS STORY!



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