

Noble Train of Artillery Reading Comprehension for Grades 4-6

On May 10, 1775, Benedict Arnold, Ethan Allen, and the Green Mountain Boys, conducted a successful raid of Fort Ticonderoga. The bloodless raid yielded an incredible cache of weapons for the fledgling Patriot cause. There was a problem, however. Fort Ticonderoga was located in remote upstate New York, where the weapons were of little use. How could the Patriots transport the heavy weaponry 300 miles to break the British blockade of Boston Harbor?

That same year, Commander-in-Chief George Washington was put in charge of Patriot forces in Boston. Recognizing a need for heavy weaponry, Washington chose the 25-year-old bookseller, Henry Knox to lead the expedition to transport the weapons to Boston. On December 5, 1775, Knox reached Fort Ticonderoga. Knox's first assignment was to evaluate the weapons and to determine which would be transported. Knox chose 59 different weapons, including several large cannons called "Big Berthas." In all, the load of weapons was estimated to weigh 60 tons.

Much of what is known about Knox's journey comes from his largely incomplete and tattered diary. On December 17, Knox wrote to Washington that he was on his way to Boston and had procured 42 sleds and 80 "yoke" of oxen. By Christmas Day, Knox had crossed the icy Hudson River near Albany, although two feet of snow slowed his progress. It took an additional two weeks for Knox and his team to usher all of the cannons across the river. In the process, several cannons fell through the ice and were retrieved. Although details within Knox's diary are sketchy, he apparently crossed the Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts and reached Framingham, Massachusetts, on January 25. Knox had reached the outskirts of Boston at Cambridge two days later. The entire journey, dubbed "one of the most stupendous feats of logistics" in the Revolutionary War, took a total of ten weeks.

On March 4, 1776, Patriot soldiers occupied Dorchester Heights, a series of low hills overlooking Boston. Washington ordered the cannons captured from Fort Ticonderoga to be positioned on the heights, threatening the British fleet in the harbor below. Under the cover of darkness, 2,000 Patriot soldiers under the command of John Thomas, and supervised by George Washington, painstakingly moved cannons into place, built makeshift fortifications, cleared trees, and built rock-filled barrels that could be rolled down the hills in case of a British attack. Giant hay stacks were strategically placed to quiet the noise of the preparations.

When the British realized what had occurred, they made plans to attack the hill to dislodge the Patriots. Their plans, however, were thwarted by a powerful snowstorm, which gave British General William Howe time to reconsider this action. On March 17, 1776, General Howe instructed his soldiers and fleet to leave the city of Boston and its harbor. The British withdrew to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Boston was safe for the time being.

- 1. What was the major problem at Fort Ticonderoga?**
 - A. British reinforcements threatened to attack
 - B. Fort Ticonderoga was in a remote part of New York
 - C. The weapons captured at Fort Ticonderoga had to be transported to Boston
 - D. It was impossible to break the British blockade at Boston

- 2. Which of the following WAS NOT a problem encountered by Henry Knox?**
 - A. British soldiers
 - B. Mountains
 - C. Icy rivers
 - D. Snowstorms

- 3. Which of the following best describes the journal of Henry Knox?**
 - A. Detailed and full of specific information
 - B. Pristine and meticulous
 - C. Vague, unfinished, and lacking details
 - D. Full of secrets and gossip

- 4. The “Noble Train of Artillery” has been called one of the most “stupendous feats of logistics” in the American Revolution. Which of the following conveys the intended meaning?**
 - A. “There is no way that could ever be done again.”
 - B. “This proves Henry Knox is a genius.”
 - C. “It was unbelievable that Knox was able to bring those weapons to Boston.”
 - D. “From a military standpoint, Knox’s accomplishments proved the Patriots could win the war.”

- 5. What was the effect of the Noble Train of Artillery?**
 - A. The British were forced to leave Boston
 - B. The Patriots became an independent nation.
 - C. The British attacked the Patriots at Dorchester Heights
 - D. The Patriots attacked the British under the cover of darkness

- 6. What happened first?**
 - A. General Washington ordered the cannons positioned on Dorchester Heights
 - B. March 18, 1776
 - C. General Howe prepared to attack Dorchester Heights
 - D. A powerful snowstorm hit Boston

7. What does “makeshift” mean in the sentence below?

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- A. Complicated
- B. Strong
- C. Professional
- D. Temporary