

# Henry Knox: First Secretary of War

Henry drew his fist back, ready to let it fly.

“Halt!” yelled Constable Evans. “All you do is get into brawls, Henry.”

Henry glared at the teen who would have received his punch. “Yeah, fighting is in my blood. One day I will lead men with that fighting spirit.”

When Henry’s father died, he needed to support his mother. He went from working in a book store to owning his own store. He loved reading, especially about artillery. He quickly became an expert on the subject.

In 1772, Henry became a member of the Boston Grenadier Corps and volunteered at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. It was then that General Washington met Henry.

“Henry,” said General Washington, “I know that you’re an expert on artillery. I’m commissioning you a colonel in charge of our artillery. Your first order of business is to defend Boston from the British. We don’t want them to take control of the Boston Harbor.”

Henry’s eyes lit up. “Yes, sir. I know what to do. We’ll move 50 cannons from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. I’ll use oversized sleds and oxen to transport the cannons over the 300 miles of winter roads.”

“Do what you have to,” said General Washington. “I leave it in your hands.”

Henry organized the transport and in March 1776, the cannons were positioned in Dorchester Heights. When the enemy saw the cannons facing them, they quickly retreated. The Americans won Boston.

After Boston, Henry helped put strong defenses in Connecticut and Rhode Island. He created a team of 520 officers and soldiers and 120 cannons. He then joined General Washington and his forces in New York.

After being forced to retreat across the Delaware River at Trenton, New Jersey, the American Army needed to regroup.

“Henry,” said General Washington. “We need to keep morale up and we need to plan an offensive. You will direct it.”

The two soldiers devised a plan that would take them back across the Delaware. They put it into action on Christmas night, 1776.

The Americans surprised the enemy forces at Trenton and captured 1000 men and lots of supplies.

After they carried the captives and supplies back across the Delaware, General Washington shook Henry's hand. "We couldn't have done this without you. I'm commissioning you to brigadier general."

With the confidence of that victory, General Washington crossed the Delaware into New Jersey again. In the battles that followed, Knox and his men battled aggressively. The British were eventually driven back and defeated.

General Washington took his hat off and wiped his forehead. "You continually prove yourself invaluable, Henry. I'm giving you a commendation and you'll go to Massachusetts to raise a battalion for the artillery and create an arsenal."

"General, you honor me."

A few years after the Revolutionary War, Henry wrote to General Washington. "Friend, I am thrilled to tell you I have been elected secretary of war by Congress in this year of 1785."

General Washington wrote back. "Henry, it is a well-deserved position. I know you will do it honor."

**Questions**

1. How did Henry feel about reading?
2. Why do you think Henry's eyes lit up when General Washington commissioned him colonel in charge of our artillery?
3. Why did General Washington promote Henry to Brigadier General?
4. What position was Henry appointed to in 1785?