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Paine provided the intellectual and emotional flint to spark colonists' feelings into flames, Knox provided the physical means for the revolutionary army to start fighting. Henry Knox was a bookworm and also a poor, fatherless boy. To support his mother and his younger brother, by the age of 9 he was apprenticed to Boston booksellers. He was encouraged to read by Mr. Wharton and Mr. Bowes, his employers, but fiction was not his game. The glory of war and particularly the noisiest aspect of war, artillery, fascinated the boy, and he read every book on war, military training, and particularly weaponry stocked in the bookstore.

Henry could hold his own in the rough and tumble of Boston alleys, but at the bookshop, he impressed patrons, including Sam and his cousin John Adams, with his intelligence and pleasant manner.

In his free time, he added to his book knowledge of war by observing militia drills and military parades. Eventually, Henry, 16 years old, joined ranks under the command of Loyalist Lieutenant Adino Paddock, where he learned about loading, firing and maintaining artillery pieces. From treatises such as *Sharpe's Military Guide*, he absorbed information about designing effective fortifications, transporting heavy cannons, and discerning topographic features that could win or lose a battle. At 21 in 1771, Henry Knox opened his own bookshop with stock purchased and sent from London, as well as stationery, ledgers, and journals. But the trials of the British occupation of Boston inspired him to leave the comfort of a pleasant bookstore proprietorship to embark on a wintry visit to Fort Ticonderoga, which required all his youthful energy, savvy problem-solving, and fending off a few competitors as well.

The story properly begins with Benedict Arnold, who was as great a hero in the first half of the Revolution as he was a villain in the second. Indeed, he has been called the best general on both sides of the war. At 16, Arnold joined a militia, traveling to fight the French in Canada. He was advertised as a deserter in one company, joined another, and finally returned home to New Haven, Connecticut where he opened his own drug and bookstore and married the daughter of the local high sheriff. He was a quick-tempered fellow, and when he heard of the Boston Massacre, chafed, "Good God, are the Americans all asleep and yielding up their liberties, or are they all turned philosophers that they do not take immediate vengeance?"

When the shot heard 'round the world echoed in New Haven, Arnold, by then a 34-year-old captain in the militia, dashed to the town powder house and said he would break down the

door himself if the town fathers did not give him the keys within five minutes. They did, and Arnold and his company of the Governor's Foot Guards set off post-haste to Boston in their scarlet, white and black uniforms. At Boston, Arnold remembered Ticonderoga from his teen-age service and volunteered to seize the cannon. The Massachusetts Committee of Safety said fine, and Arnold was off to recruit a force. At Stockbridge, Massachusetts, he heard to his dismay that Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys were already after the cannon.

For some time, Allen and his Boys, when sober enough, had been waging war against New York's claims to the disputed New Hampshire Grants, territory that later became Vermont. Now Allen headed out from the Catamount Tavern in Bennington, traveling to Fort Ticonderoga. Allen was at least as rash as Arnold and maybe tougher. Made a prisoner by the British after impetuously trying to capture Montreal with scarcely 30 men, Allen showed his fellow POWs a chipped tooth, suffered from biting off one of his handcuffs. One of his astonished spectators exclaimed, "damn him, can he eat iron?" Aghast that Allen might steal his thunder as well as the cannons, Arnold set off in hot pursuit, a single servant trailing in his dust. When he caught up with Allen, the two argued furiously as to who was authorized as commander of the expedition.

"What shall I do with the damned rascal?" Allen demanded of his Boys, some of whom wanted to take a shot at Arnold.

"Better go side by side," replied a cooler head. So they did, Arnold marching with the sullen Allen at the head of the column, but agreeing to give no orders. As dawn broke May 10, 1775, Arnold and Allen, each trying to shoulder his way in front, stormed into the sleeping fort. Allen stabbed a sentry, whose musket misfired and awakened a dazed Lieutenant Jocelyn Feltham of His Majesty's Twenty-Sixth Foot, who stood bewildered, his pants in his hand.

“Come out, you damned rat,” roared Allen, and out came the garrison commander, Captain William Delaplace. Asked by whose authority he was acting, Allen roared again: “In the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress!” In fact, the dovish Congress was highly embarrassed when it learned what Allen and Arnold had done, and for a time ordered the crumbling old fort to be abandoned lest the British think the colonies were overly belligerent. Congress lamely explained that Fort Ti was taken to forestall an invasion from Canada, although there wasn’t a redcoat within miles except for Delaplace, his garrison and 24 women and children. There were British in Boston, however. The problem was how to get the cannon to where the war was.

Henry Knox was in Boston, and he had long dreamt about cannons. At 230 pounds, Knox was something of a cannonball himself. Henry was a convivial man, throwing his girth into the frenzy of militia mustering days and Guy Fawkes parades, and despite his weight, he was brawny enough to hold up a wagon when it lost a wheel during one of the revelries. Guns and gunpowder were the stuff of Knox’s dreams. His one shyness seems to have been the loss of two left fingers, blown off in a hunting accident. In public, Knox wrapped the mutilated hand in a handkerchief.

Arnold, born in 1741, was nine years older than Knox, and his childhood was also cut short by the abandonment of his father. Knox’s father went to sea and Arnold’s father drank himself into a stupor. Both young men dropped out of school and were apprenticed, Knox to the bookstore and Arnold to an apothecary. Knox fared better than Arnold. His master Nicholas Bowes became a surrogate father to young Knox and encouraged Henry to educate himself, loaning him books to take home. Bowes’ kind treatment of his apprentice fostered Knox’s own generous nature. Arnold, on the other hand, was left more to his own devices and turned out to be something of a lout. Both men were practicing for their military future in local militias by the age of 16, Arnold in Connecticut, Knox in Boston. Ironically, when some British artillerymen bound for Quebec were held up in Boston by weather, they helped train Knox’s company, little realizing the trouble they were sowing. Knox and Arnold each

started businesses. Interestingly, while Arnold set up his own apothecary shop in the 1760s, he also sold books. Knox stuck mainly to books. Americans at the time had perhaps the highest literacy rate in the world with white males having approximately a 90 percent literacy rate, white females, 40 percent literate. Books were rather a luxury when there were forests to be cleared, wool to be carded, and butter to be churned. The emphasis was on “how to” practicality. Knox offered his readers such useful tomes as Manning’s *On Female Diseases*, and L.W.C.’s *A Very Perfect Discourse in Order How to Know the Age of a Horse*. And the books helped influence radical thinking; from the native best-seller John Dickinson’s *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, which stated the colonial case in reasoned terms, to John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which was something of a bible among the colonial radicals.

Thus Knox had become a comfortable member of the “leather apron” set, shopkeepers and artisans who worked in the tiny shops along Boston’s twisting streets and lived upstairs. Knox’s shop became “a fashionable morning lounge” where Paul Revere might drop in to chat, or the blacksmith, Nathanael Greene, when he was in town from Rhode Island.

To be continued....

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