



HENRY KNOX

---

AMERICAN HERO

BUNKER HILL TO YORKTOWN

By Margot Morrell



"KNOX WAS ONE OF THOSE PROVIDENTIAL CHARACTERS  
WHICH SPRING UP IN EMERGENCIES, AS IF THEY WERE  
FORMED BY AND FOR THE OCCASION."

WASHINGTON IRVING

*LIFE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON*



"AS TO GENERAL KNOX, BUT ONE-HALF HAS BEEN SAID IN  
COMMENDING HIS MILITARY GENIUS. HE IS A MAN OF  
TALENT, WELL INSTRUCTED, OF A BUOYANT DISPOSITION,  
INGENUOUS AND TRUE: IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW HIM  
WITHOUT ESTEEMING AND LOVING HIM."

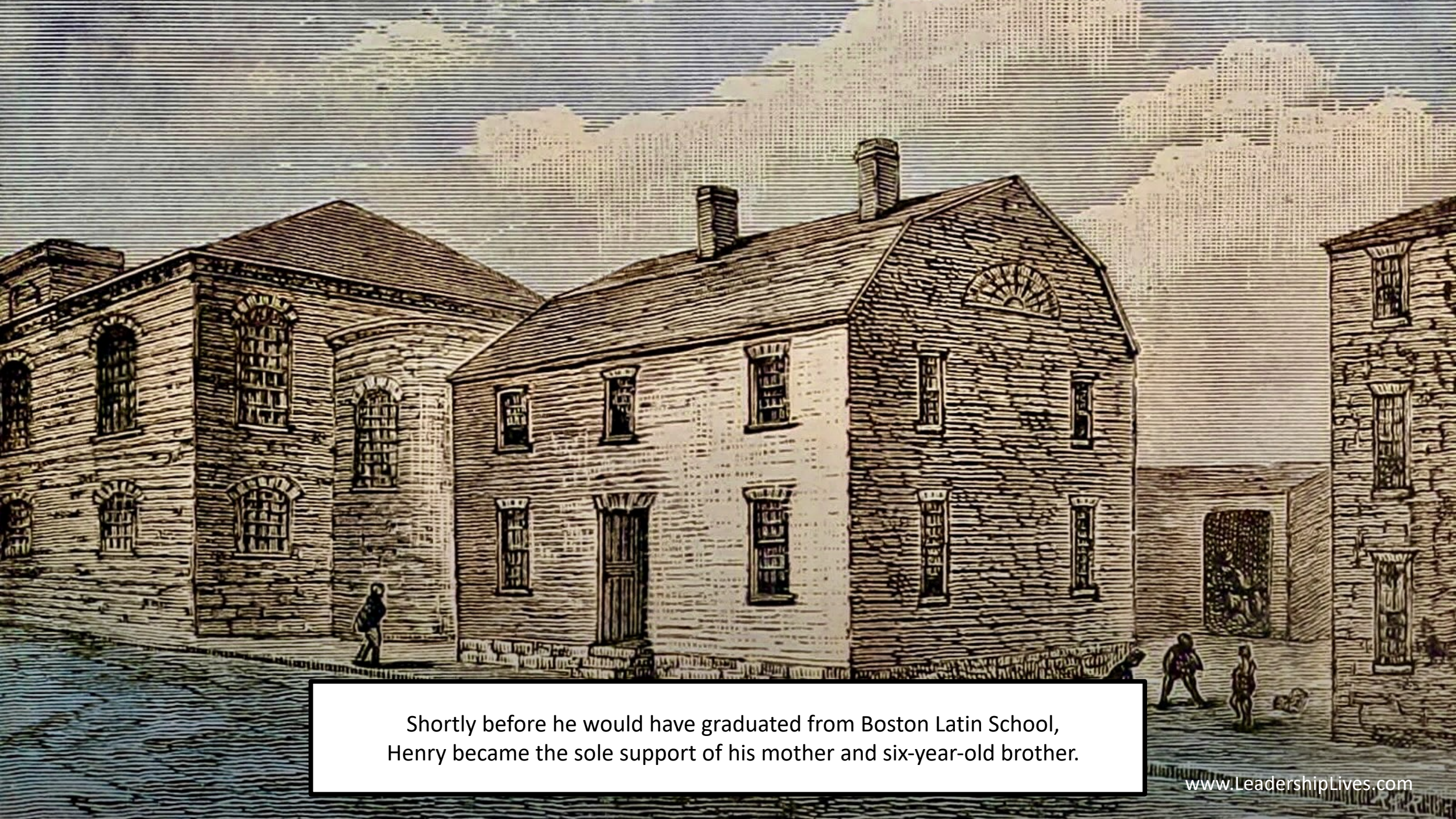
MARQUIS DE CHASTELLUX  
BATTLE OF YORKTOWN





Henry Knox was born in Boston in July 1750 - the seventh of ten sons. His father, William Knox, a ship-builder from Scotland, married Bostonian, Mary Campbell, in 1735. The family lived on Sea Street, off Summer Street, on the Boston water-front. William's business collapsed in 1756. A few years later, he fled to the West Indies to avoid creditors. Henry's two eldest brothers went to sea and were never heard from again.





Shortly before he would have graduated from Boston Latin School, Henry became the sole support of his mother and six-year-old brother.





Henry got a job at the Wharton & Bowes bookstore, near the southeast corner of what is now Washington Street and State Street. John Wharton and Nicholas Bowes had recently bought the business.

Bowes became a surrogate father for Knox and instilled in him a strong work ethic.

Bowes encouraged Henry to pursue his education by reading the store's books. Knox was interested in mathematics, Greek and Roman history, and especially military matters. He taught himself French which proved useful in the years ahead.

The Old Corner Book Store on what was then Cornhill, south and across the street of Wharton & Bowes' bookstore.





Boston Latin School

Boston Massacre

Wharton & Bowes Book Store

Knox's London Book Store

Old South Meetinghouse

Knox Home

# HENRY KNOX'S BOSTON

MAP DRAWN BY LIEUT. THOMAS HYDE PAGE  
FOR HIS MAJESTY'S CORPS OF ENGINEERS, 1775





Boston Common, 1768

Working at the bookstore, Henry got to know British army officers who encouraged him to join an elite artillery company called The Train that drilled on Boston Common.

Four years later, in 1772, Knox co-founded and served as second-in-command of the Boston Grenadier Corps.





On the evening of March 5, 1770, alerted by alarm bells, Henry witnessed the Boston Massacre.

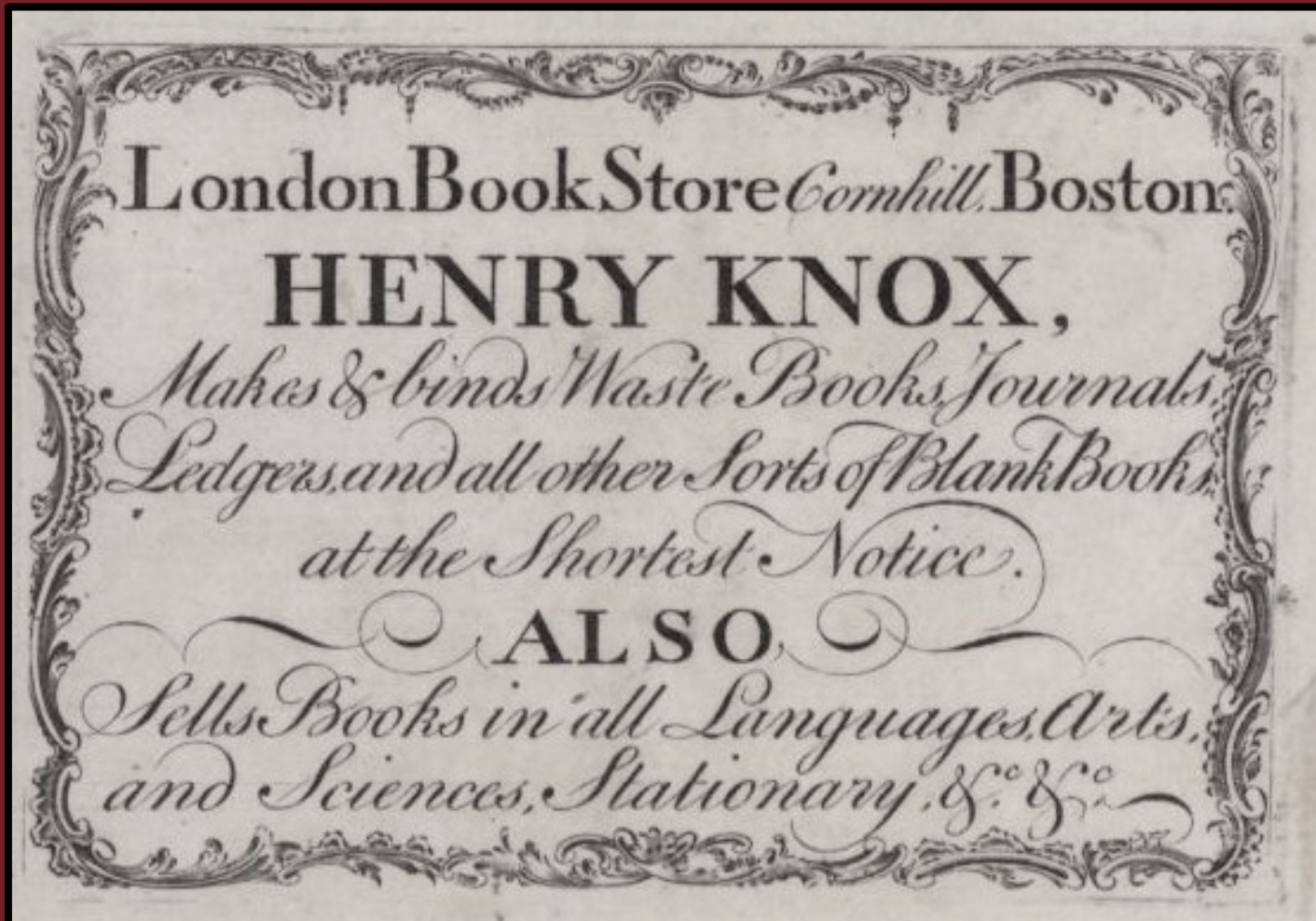
The 19-year-old strode into the middle of the fracas, attempted to separate the combatants, and urged the officer in charge, Captain Preston, to call off his men.

The incident was triggered by a young apprentice harassing a soldier. Hours later, the situation exploded when eight soldiers fired into the crowd killing five and injuring eight others.

Captain Preston and six soldiers were tried and acquitted of murder. Two soldiers were found guilty of manslaughter.

As a witness at the soldiers' trial, Knox got to know their attorney, John Adams. Adams later commented that Knox had "attracted my notice by his pleasing manners and inquisitive turn of mind."



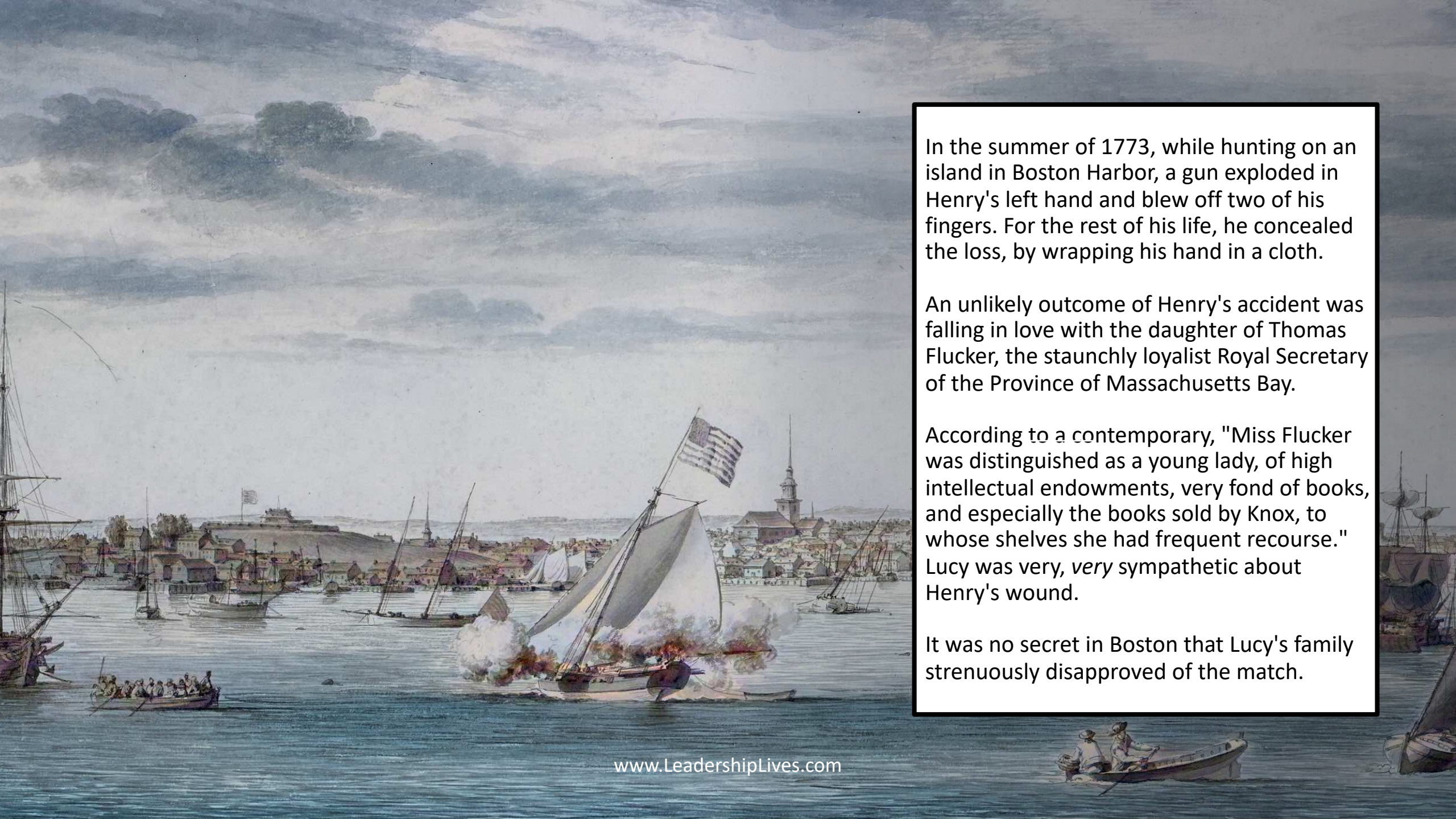


In July 1771, backed by Nicholas Bowes, Henry opened his own bookstore a few doors down from Wharton & Bowes. The new bookstore specialized in book-binding and foreign languages. John Wharton had died in 1769. Henry's mother died in December 1771.

The *Boston Gazette* reported Knox "has just imported in the last ships from London a large and very elegant assortment of the most modern books in all branches of Literature, Arts, and Sciences..."

Henry's bookstore was soon the fashionable place to be seen among British officers and young ladies.





In the summer of 1773, while hunting on an island in Boston Harbor, a gun exploded in Henry's left hand and blew off two of his fingers. For the rest of his life, he concealed the loss, by wrapping his hand in a cloth.

An unlikely outcome of Henry's accident was falling in love with the daughter of Thomas Flucker, the staunchly loyalist Royal Secretary of the Province of Massachusetts Bay.

According to a contemporary, "Miss Flucker was distinguished as a young lady, of high intellectual endowments, very fond of books, and especially the books sold by Knox, to whose shelves she had frequent recourse." Lucy was very, very sympathetic about Henry's wound.

It was no secret in Boston that Lucy's family strenuously disapproved of the match.

Despite ominous warnings from her parents about the poverty that lay ahead of her, on June 16, 1774, seventeen-year-old Lucy Flucker married Henry Knox.

It proved to be an enduring love match. In 1781, after the "glorious" victory at Yorktown, Knox dashed off a note to Lucy, "the charmer of my soul."

The couple went on to have twelve children – only three of whom survived childhood.

Their only surviving son, Henry Jackson Knox, proved to be such a wastrel that he asked to be buried in an unmarked grave, far from the family plot. His sisters obliged.

Only the Knoxes' eldest daughter, Lucy Knox Thatcher, had children of her own. According to her father, she looked like her mother.



Lucy Knox Thatcher, ca. 1840





Henry's new enterprise got off to a strong start. His first order with a London publisher was for £340. In late 1772, he placed an order for £2,066.

But in March 1774, when Parliament passed the Boston Port Bill. Knox wrote to a London publisher, "This whole continent have entered into a general non-importation agreement until the late acts of parliament respecting this government, &c., are repealed."

Until the acts were repealed, Knox would not be placing any more orders.

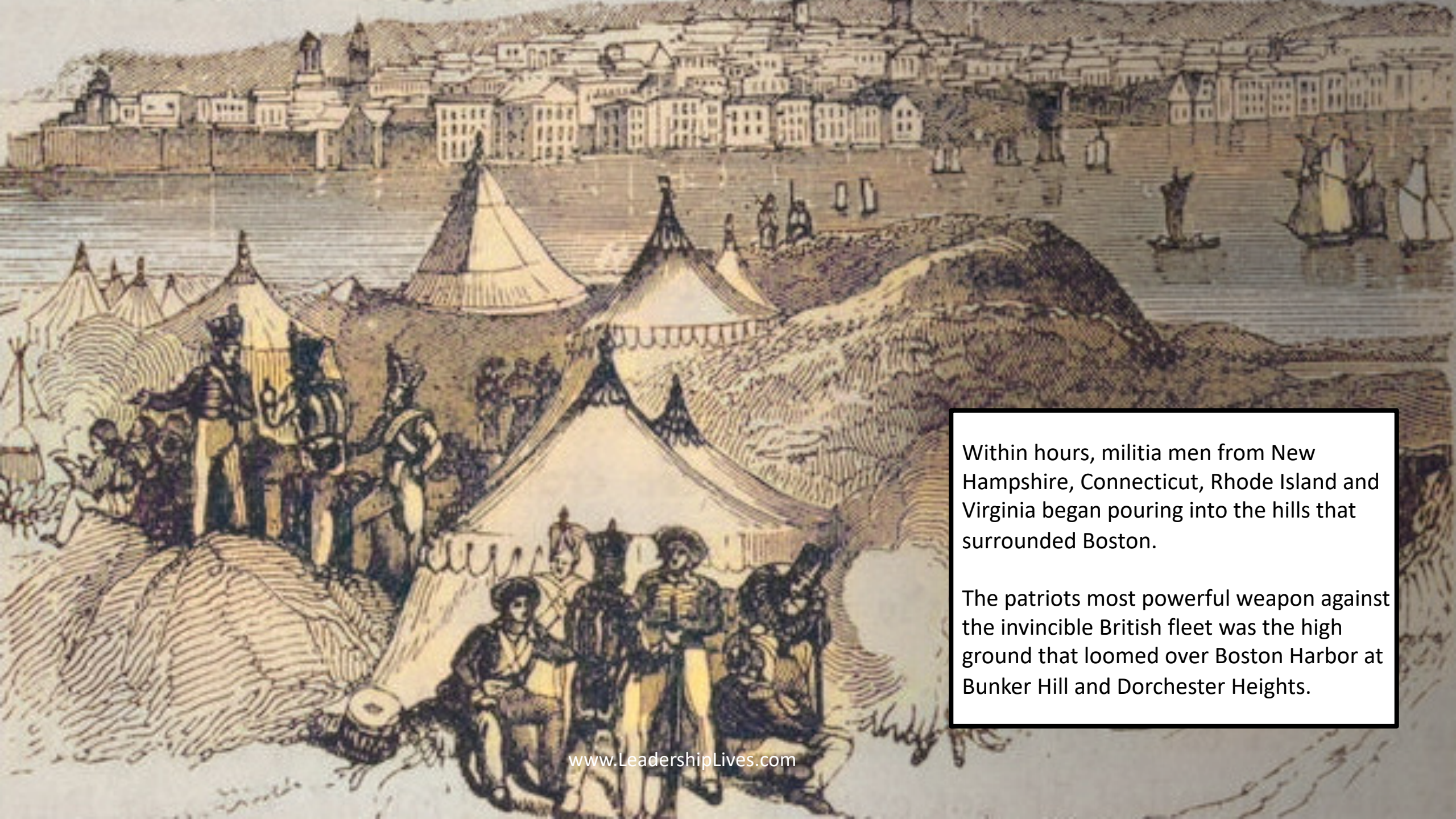


## THE SHOT HEARD ROUND THE WORLD

On April 19, 1775, the embers that had been smoldering since the passage of the detested 1765 Stamp Act and further fanned by the infuriating Tea Tax and Port Bill, exploded into an uncontrollable blaze when British forces marched through Lexington to Concord to seize the patriots' weapons.







Within hours, militia men from New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Virginia began pouring into the hills that surrounded Boston.

The patriots most powerful weapon against the invincible British fleet was the high ground that loomed over Boston Harbor at Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights.



This 1775 map by a British cartographer, shows how Boston Harbor was bordered by high ground on the north (Bunker Hill) and the southeast (Dorchester Heights).





Monatomy

General Israel Putnam's Camp

The same map provides a clear picture of the Siege of Boston.  
April 1775 – March 1776.

Bunker Hill

General John Thomas's Camp

Dorchester Heights

Head Quarters of Provincial Army,  
General Artemas Ward in command.





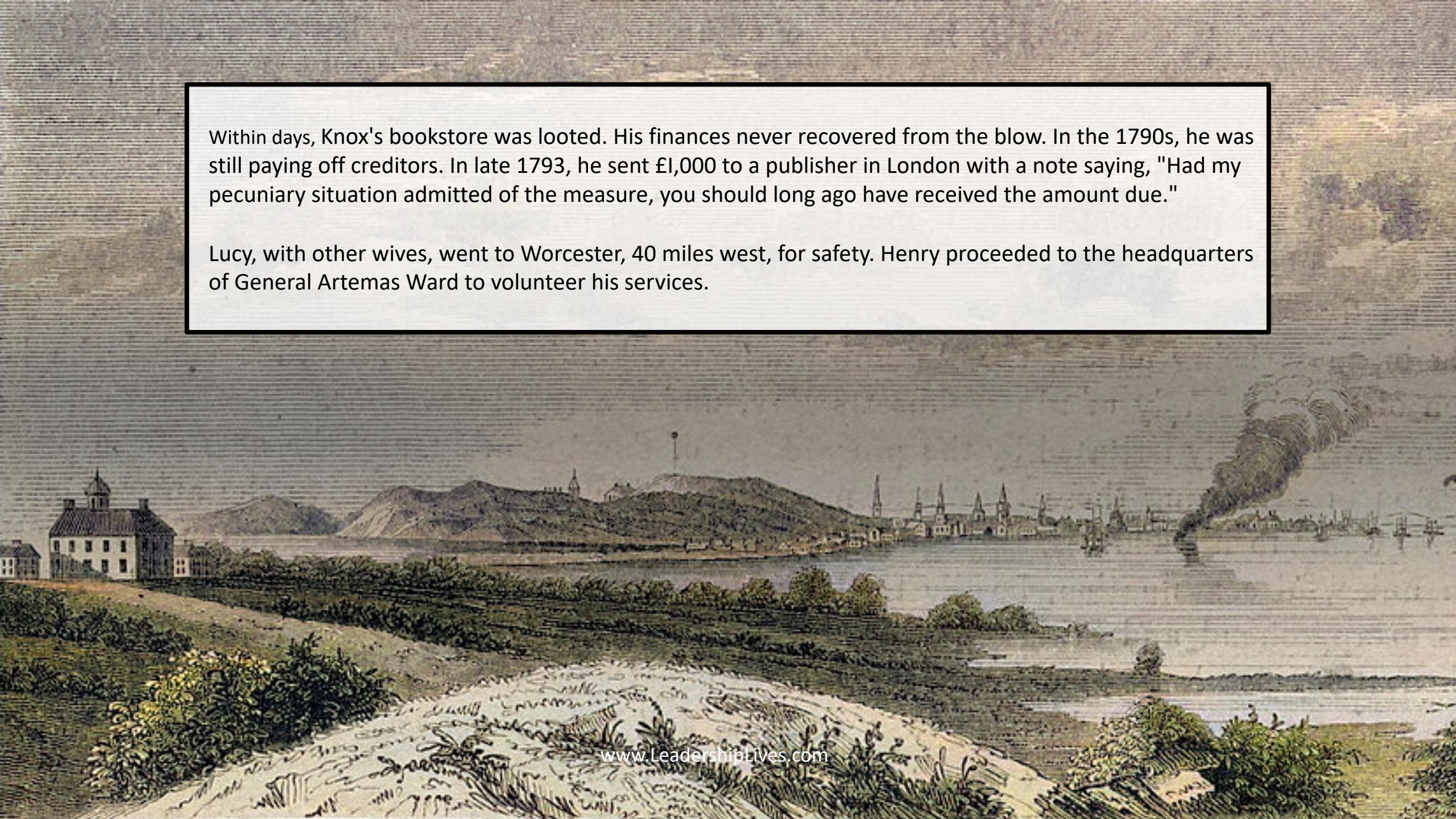
After the battles at Lexington and Concord, Henry Knox was forbidden to leave Boston. Authorities offered him "large promises" to fight on the side of the British. But, on their first anniversary, June 16, 1775, the night before the Battle of Bunker Hill, with Lucy, who had quilted his sword into the lining of her cloak, Knox slipped out of Boston.

That same day, in Philadelphia, George Washington, was notified he had been unanimously chosen by the Continental Congress to be General & Commander in Chief of the American Forces. Their paths would soon cross.

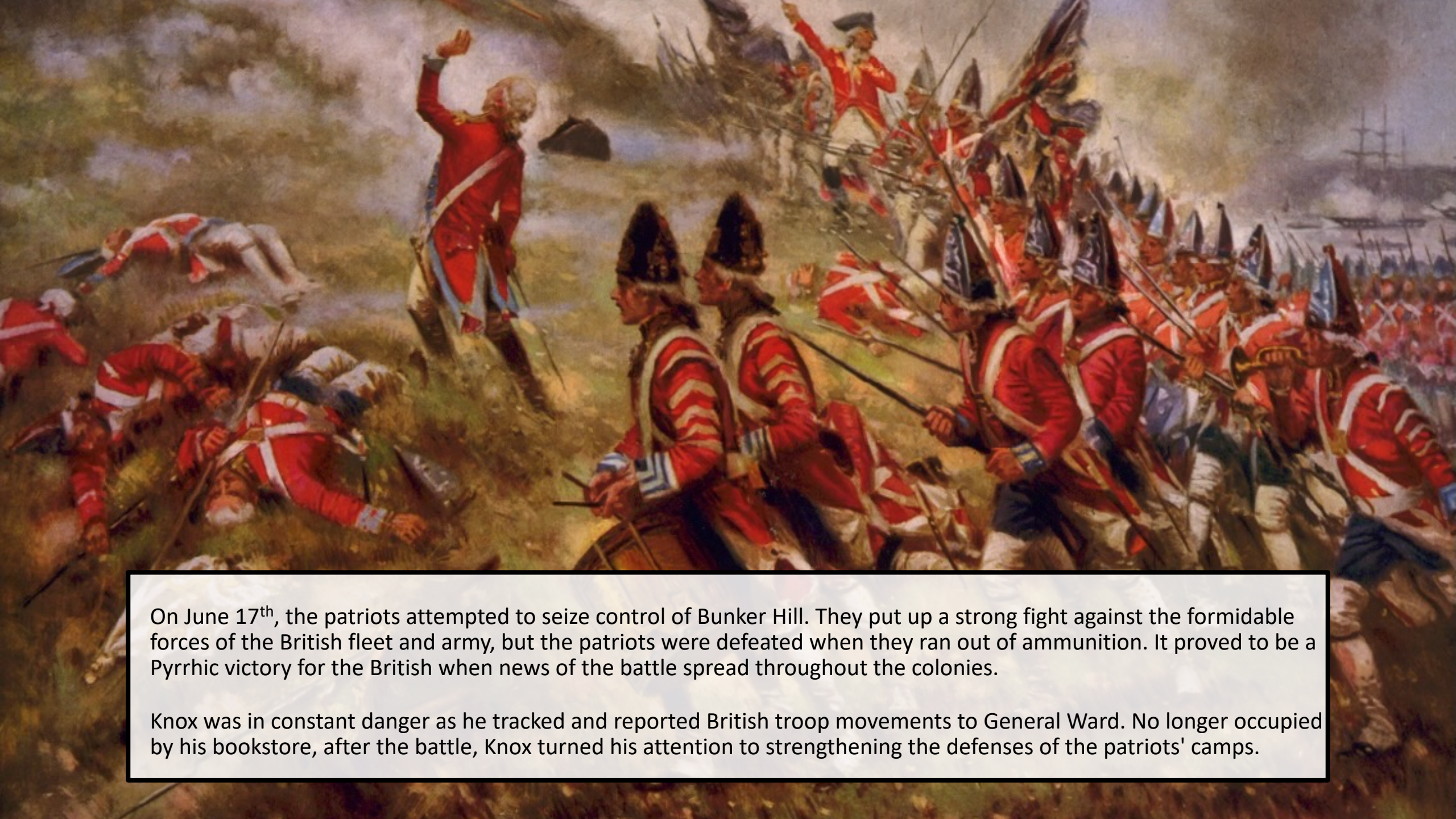


Within days, Knox's bookstore was looted. His finances never recovered from the blow. In the 1790s, he was still paying off creditors. In late 1793, he sent £1,000 to a publisher in London with a note saying, "Had my pecuniary situation admitted of the measure, you should long ago have received the amount due."

Lucy, with other wives, went to Worcester, 40 miles west, for safety. Henry proceeded to the headquarters of General Artemas Ward to volunteer his services.



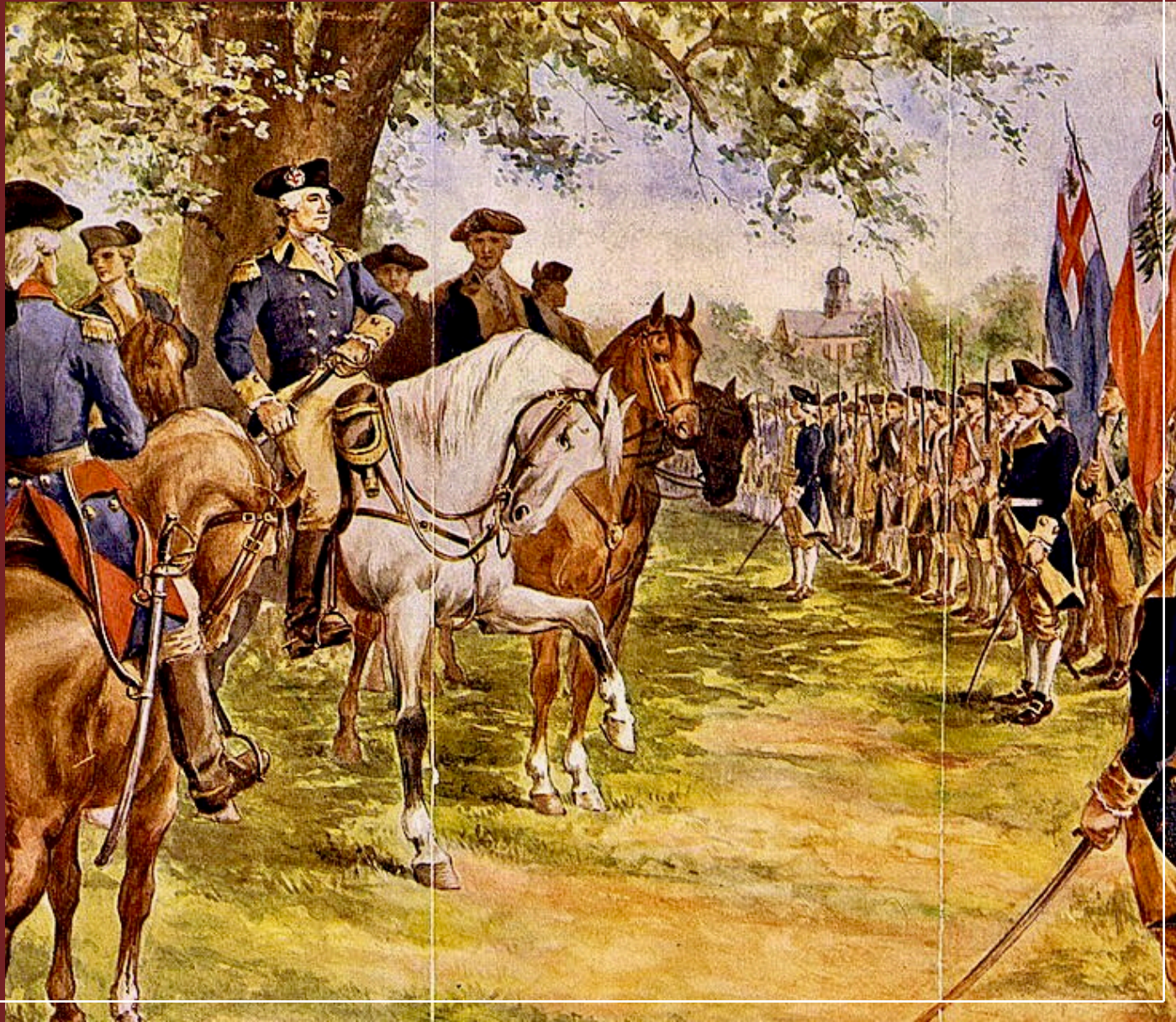




On June 17<sup>th</sup>, the patriots attempted to seize control of Bunker Hill. They put up a strong fight against the formidable forces of the British fleet and army, but the patriots were defeated when they ran out of ammunition. It proved to be a Pyrrhic victory for the British when news of the battle spread throughout the colonies.

Knox was in constant danger as he tracked and reported British troop movements to General Ward. No longer occupied by his bookstore, after the battle, Knox turned his attention to strengthening the defenses of the patriots' camps.





On July 3, 1775, General Washington arrived in Cambridge to take command of the Continental army. Three days later, Henry wrote to Lucy in Worcester,

"Yesterday, as I was going to Cambridge, I met the generals [Washington and Charles Lee], who begged me to return to Roxbury again, which I did. When they had viewed the works, they expressed the greatest pleasure and surprise at their situation and apparent utility, to say nothing of the plan, which did not escape their praise."

Washington had found the tower of strength who would be at his side for the next eight years engineering the crossing of the Delaware and the tremendous victory at Yorktown.



On July 9<sup>th</sup>, Knox wrote to Lucy, "General Washington fills his place with vast ease and dignity & dispenses happiness around him."

Washington called those in his inner circle "family."

Washington before the battle of Trenton,  
painted by his 1775 aide-de-camp,  
John Trumbull, The Met

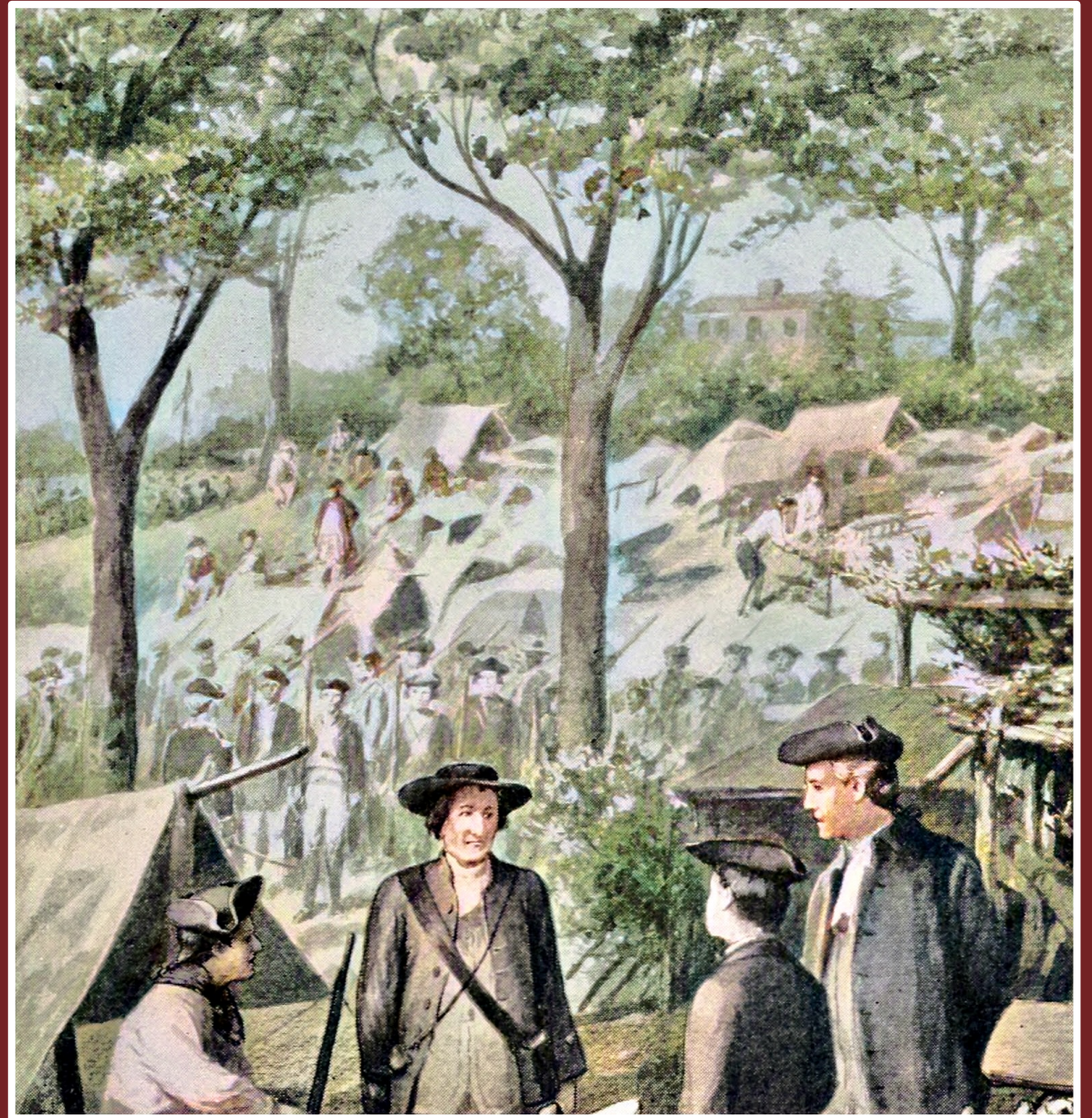




Washington was horrified to find the patriots were sorely lacking in ammunition and armaments.

Reluctant to be too specific about their dire circumstances, on August 8, Washington wrote to the New York Provincial Congress about "the Distresses of the Troops for fresh Provisions & many other (Necessaries)..."

It was soon apparent the British were digging in for the winter.







On October 21, 1775, Washington issued a general order concerning the artillery regiment which signaled changes were afoot.

A few days later, twenty-five-year-old Henry Knox wrote to John Adams turning down a commission as a lieutenant colonel. He told Adams, "that the officers and soldiers of the train of artillery will refuse to serve under their present Commander."

Knox added that he could "be of some little service to the Cause" and that he had the support of the regiment's officers.

On November 8, General Washington wrote to John Hancock taking "the liberty of recommending Henry Knox Esqr. to the consideration of the Congress."



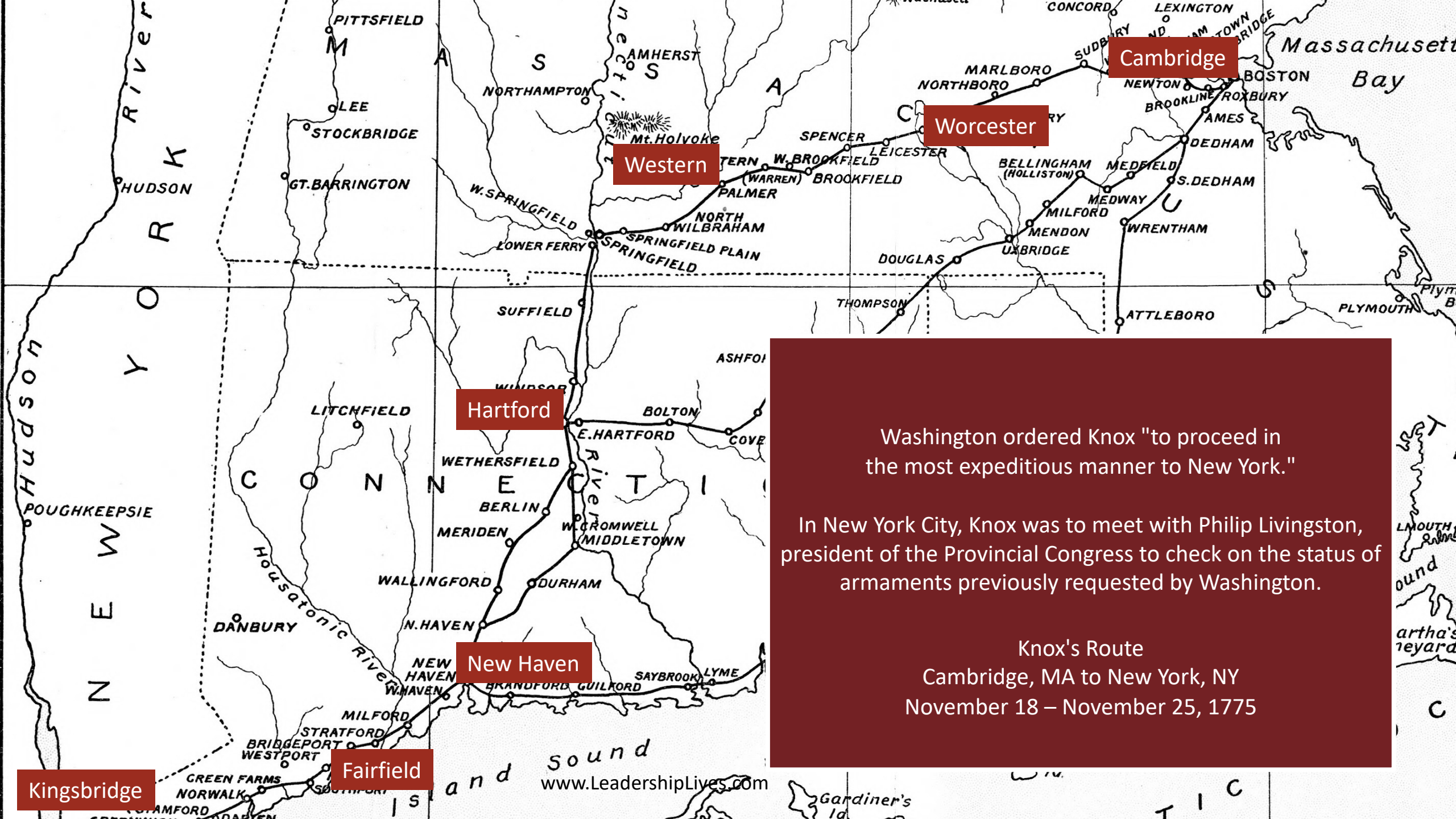


As the wheels of change ground slowly between Cambridge and Philadelphia, Knox proposed to Washington that he embark on a 300-mile journey to the forts on Lake Champlain in upstate New York to collect the armaments stored there. He hoped to make the trip in about six weeks.

From Cambridge on November 16, 1775, Knox wrote to Lucy who was still in Worcester and pregnant with their first child, "I shall be with you tomorrow night & don't be alarmed when I tell you that the General has ordered me to go to the West Ward as far as Ticonderoga about a three Weeks Journey, don't be afraid there is no fighting in the Case I am going upon business only."

Washington's Headquarters  
150 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA  
Credit: Wikimedia / NPS, Public Domain





Washington ordered Knox "to proceed in the most expeditious manner to New York."

In New York City, Knox was to meet with Philip Livingston, president of the Provincial Congress to check on the status of armaments previously requested by Washington.

Knox's Route  
Cambridge, MA to New York, NY  
November 18 – November 25, 1775





Washington provided Knox with a letter of introduction to Brigadier General Nathaniel Woodhull, a leader of the New York Provincial Congress.

Washington knew Woodhull, Philip Livingston, and General Schuyler from serving with them in the Continental Congress.

To Nathaniel Woodhull  
Cambridge, 16th November 1775}

Sir,

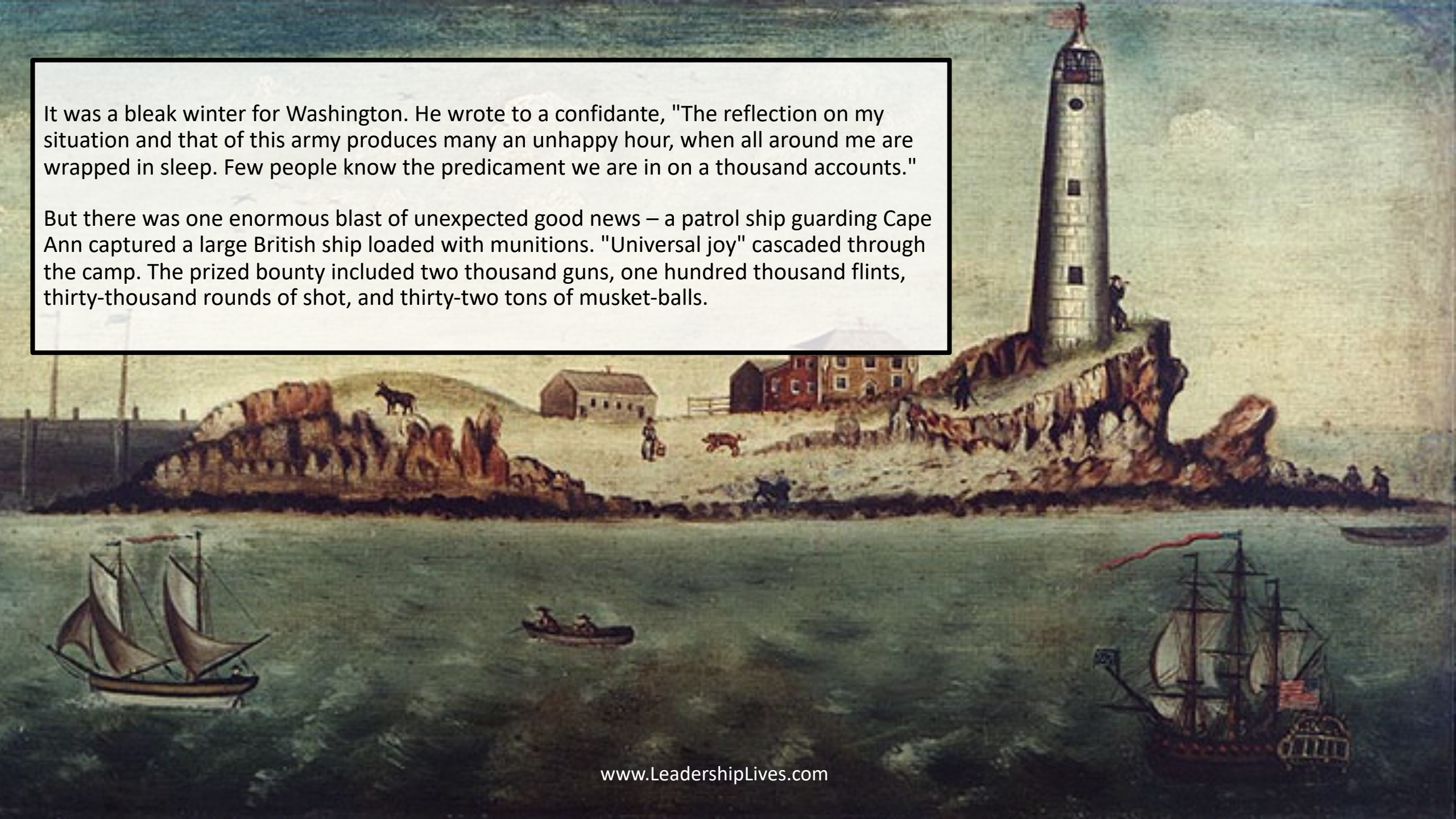
it was determined at the Conference held here in the Last Month, that Such Military Stores as Could be spared from New York, Crown Point, Ticonderoga &c, should be Sent here for the use of the Continental Army—as it was not clear to me, whether I was to send for, or that they were to be sent to me, I desired Mr. Reed on his way to Philadelphia to enquire into this Matter—as I have not heard from him on this Subject, And the Season advancing fast, I have thought it necessary to send Henry Knox Esqr. who will deliver you this. After he forwards what he Can get at your place, he will proceed to General Schuyler on this very important business. I request the favour of you Sir and the Gentlemen of your Congress to give Mr. Knox all the Assistance in your power, by So doing you will render infinite Service to your Country and vastly Oblige Sir Your most Obedient,

George Washington



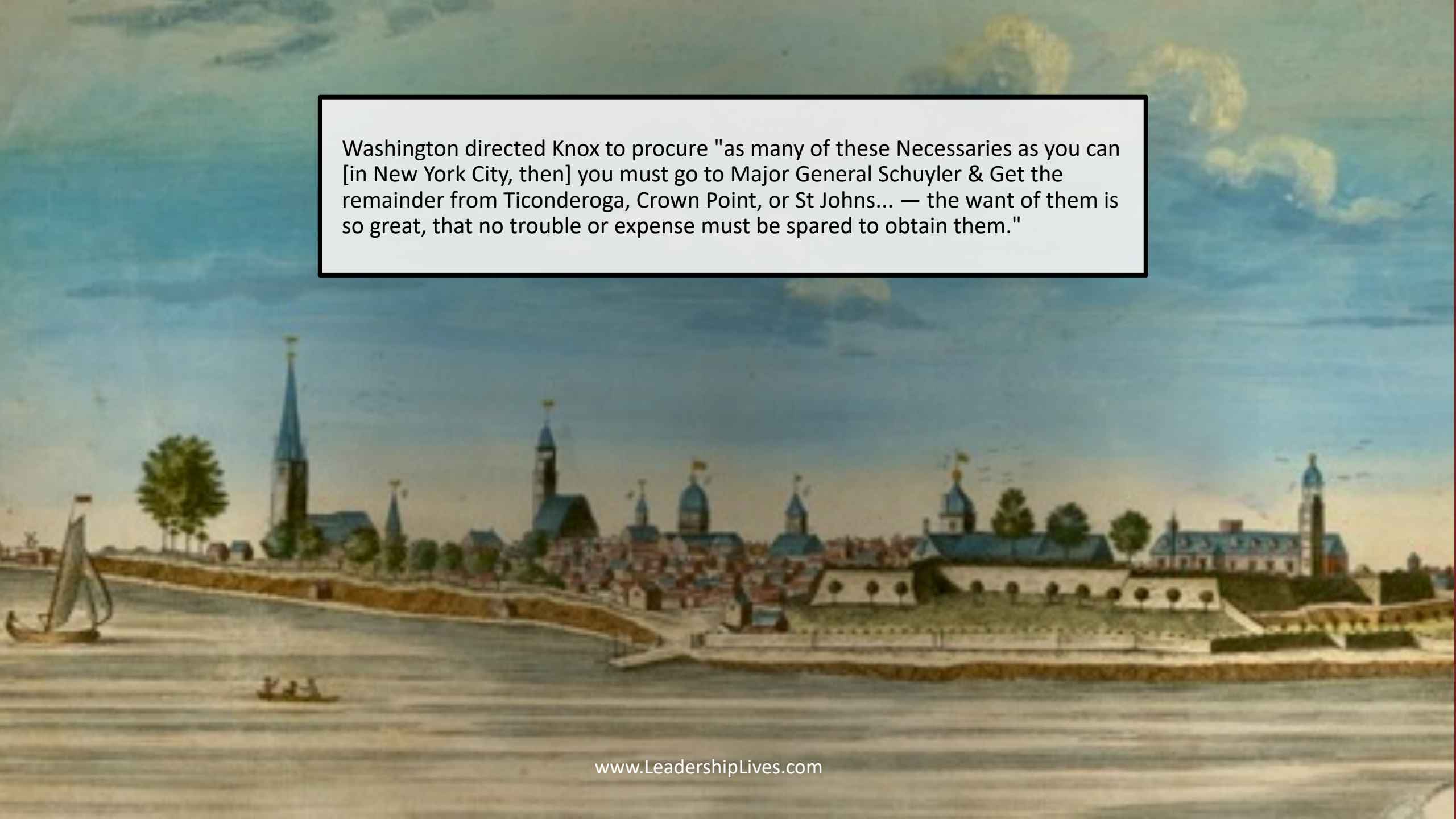
It was a bleak winter for Washington. He wrote to a confidante, "The reflection on my situation and that of this army produces many an unhappy hour, when all around me are wrapped in sleep. Few people know the predicament we are in on a thousand accounts."

But there was one enormous blast of unexpected good news – a patrol ship guarding Cape Ann captured a large British ship loaded with munitions. "Universal joy" cascaded through the camp. The prized bounty included two thousand guns, one hundred thousand flints, thirty-thousand rounds of shot, and thirty-two tons of musket-balls.

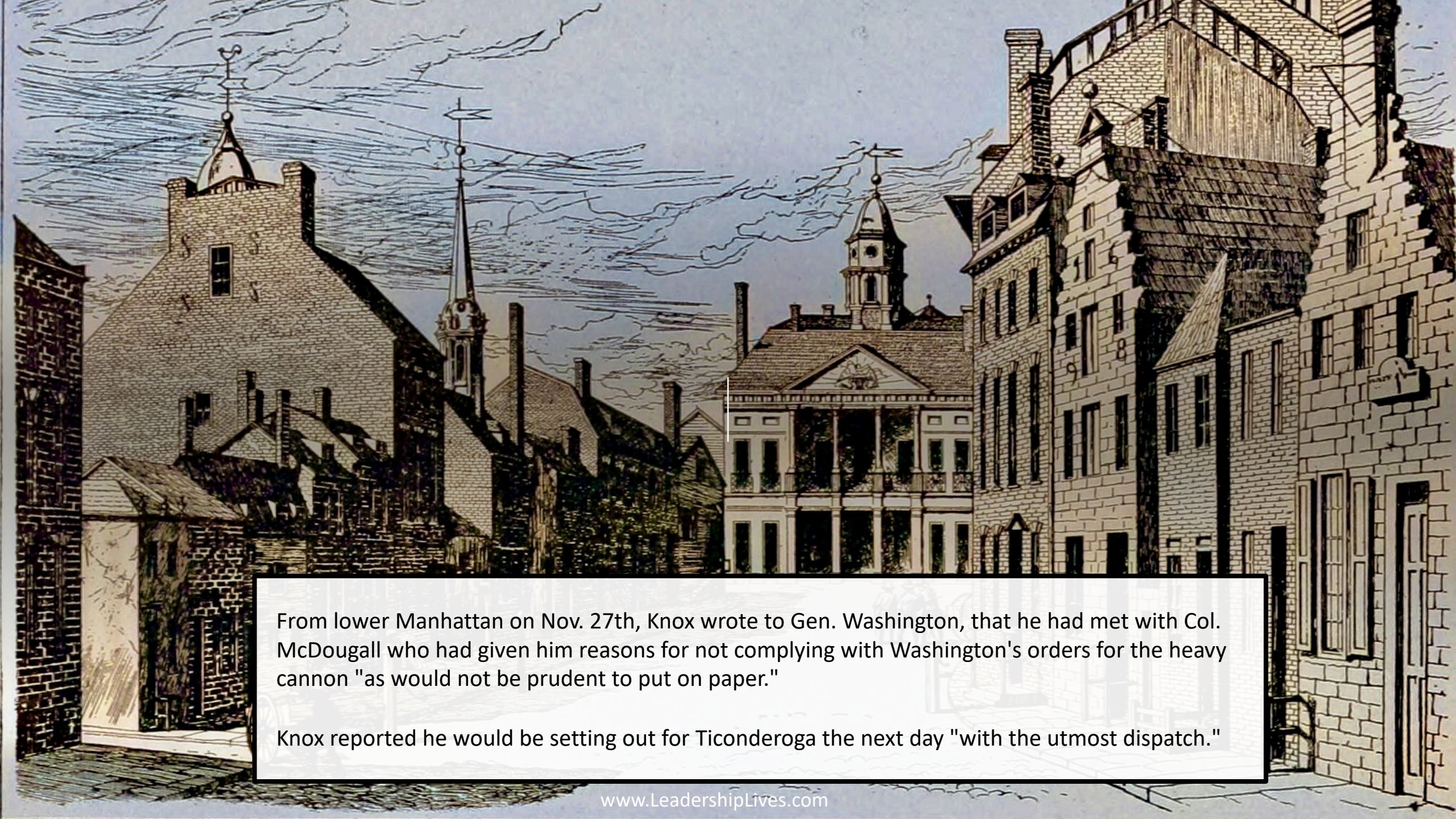




Washington directed Knox to procure "as many of these Necessaries as you can [in New York City, then] you must go to Major General Schuyler & Get the remainder from Ticonderoga, Crown Point, or St Johns... — the want of them is so great, that no trouble or expense must be spared to obtain them."



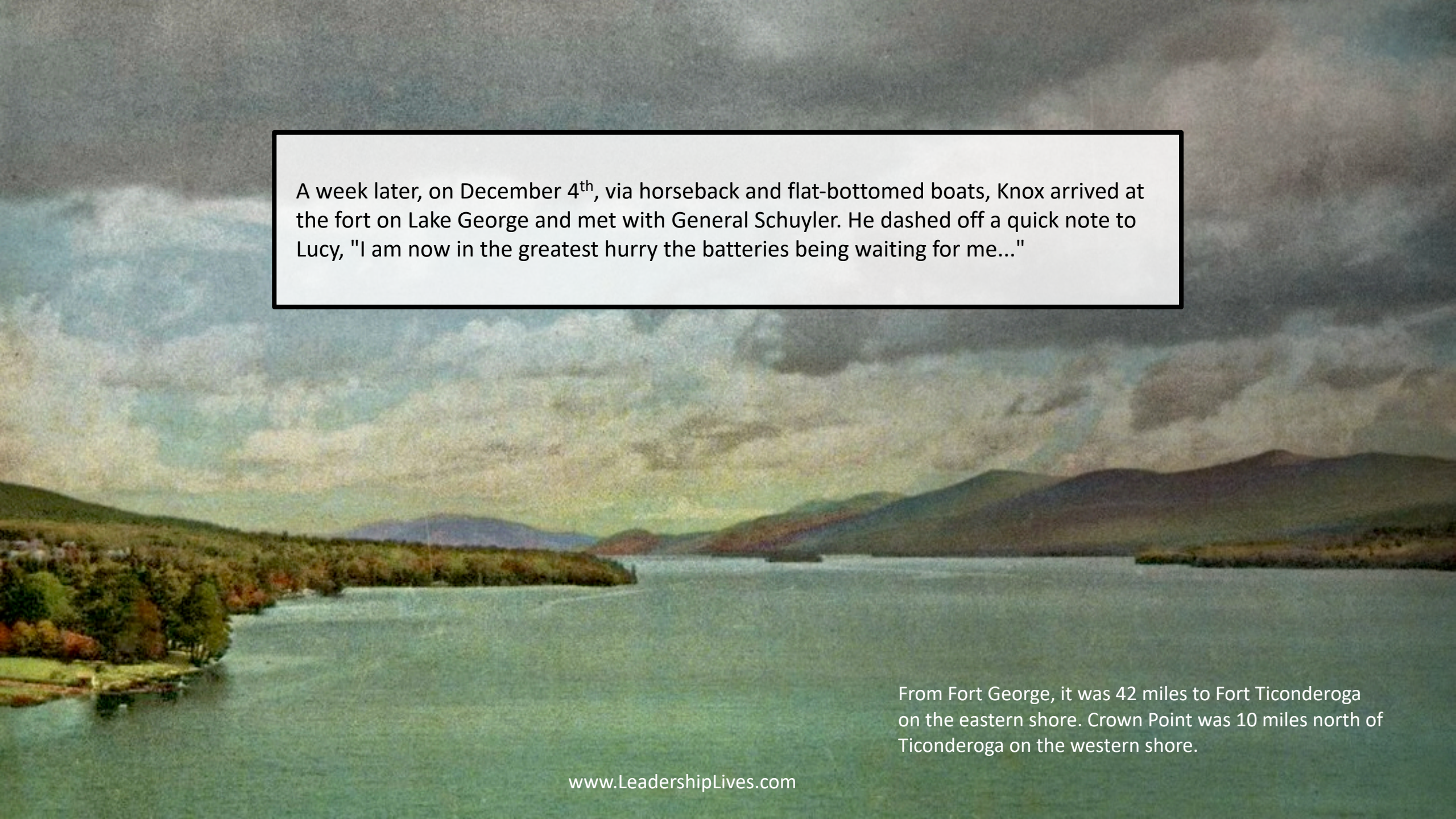




From lower Manhattan on Nov. 27th, Knox wrote to Gen. Washington, that he had met with Col. McDougall who had given him reasons for not complying with Washington's orders for the heavy cannon "as would not be prudent to put on paper."

Knox reported he would be setting out for Ticonderoga the next day "with the utmost dispatch."






A week later, on December 4<sup>th</sup>, via horseback and flat-bottomed boats, Knox arrived at the fort on Lake George and met with General Schuyler. He dashed off a quick note to Lucy, "I am now in the greatest hurry the batteries being waiting for me..."


From Fort George, it was 42 miles to Fort Ticonderoga on the eastern shore. Crown Point was 10 miles north of Ticonderoga on the western shore.





On December 8th, General Schuyler wrote to General Washington, "I was happy to meet Col. Knox at Fort George. I have made such an arrangement to get the Articles he wants at Fort George that I am confident they will arrive there in eight days from this and I shall take the advantage of the very first snow to send them to Cambridge ... there is a Sufficiency of everything Col. Knox wanted except powder and Flints."

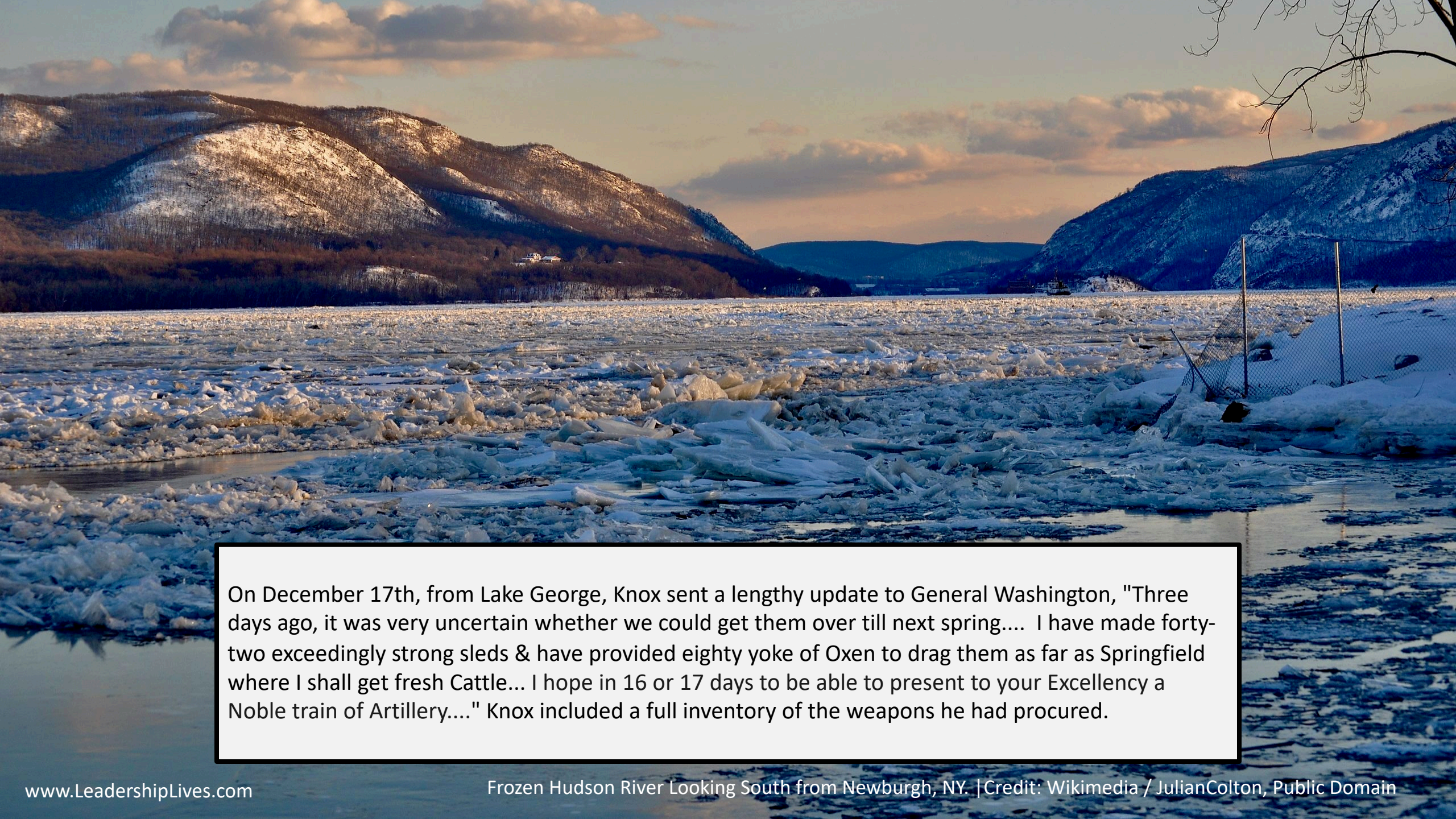




Arriving at Fort Ticonderoga on December 10<sup>th</sup>, Knox gathered up all available armaments there and at nearby at Crown Point. Then he began the long journey back to Cambridge heavily laden with cannons, mortars and howitzers.

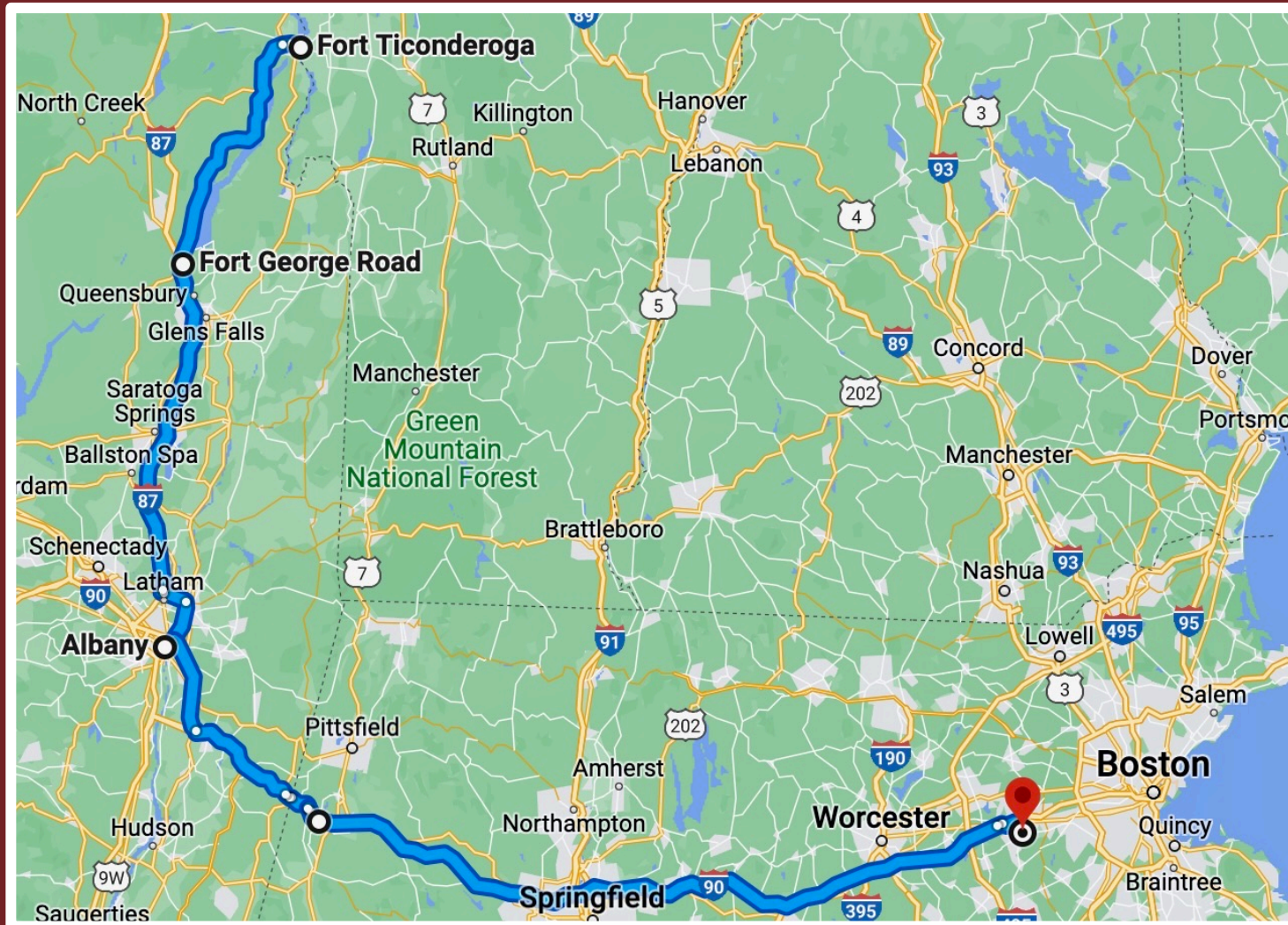
Trophy Point, West Point, NY





On December 17th, from Lake George, Knox sent a lengthy update to General Washington, "Three days ago, it was very uncertain whether we could get them over till next spring.... I have made forty-two exceedingly strong sleds & have provided eighty yoke of Oxen to drag them as far as Springfield where I shall get fresh Cattle... I hope in 16 or 17 days to be able to present to your Excellency a Noble train of Artillery...." Knox included a full inventory of the weapons he had procured.



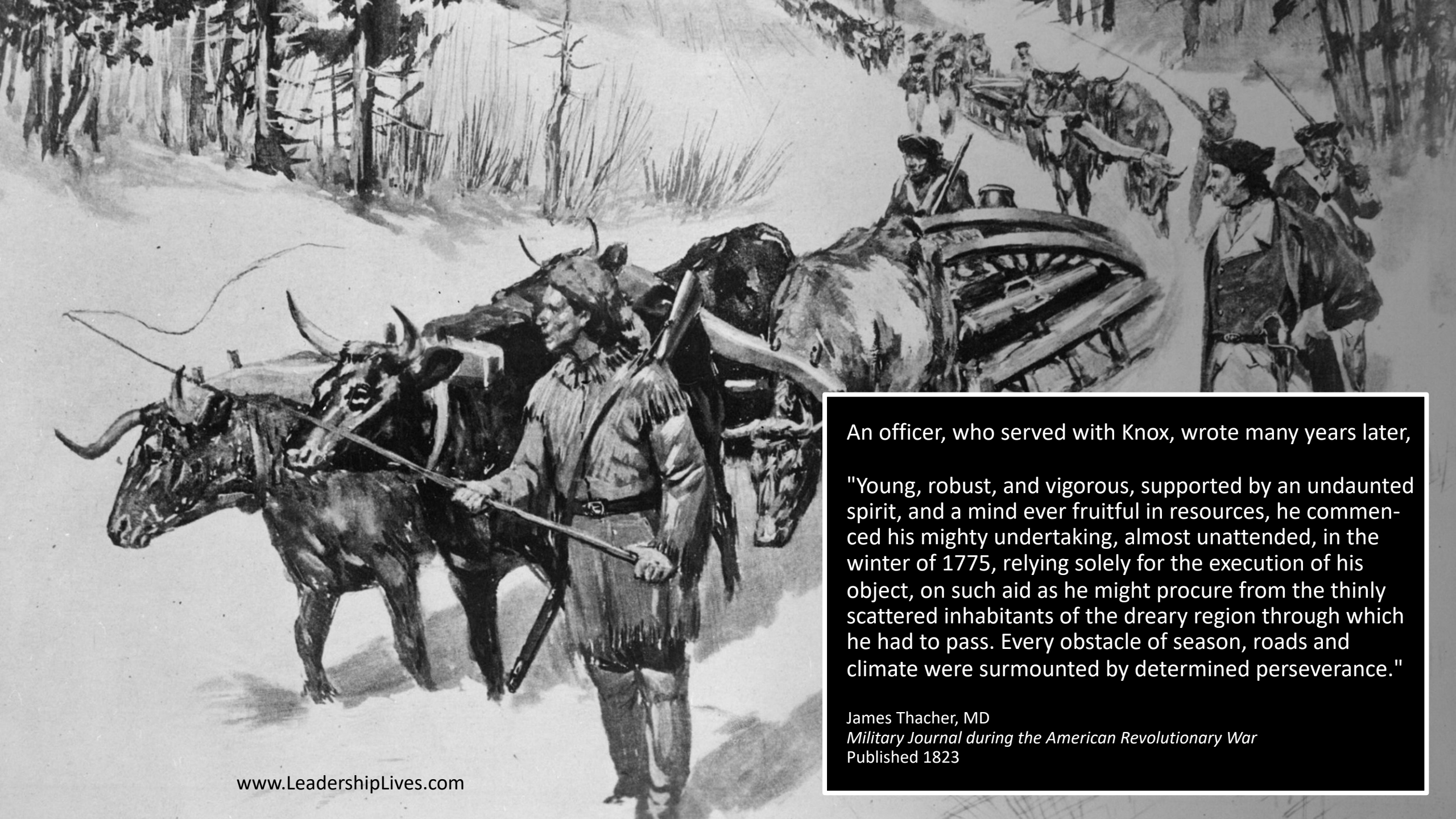


On January 5, 1776, from Albany, Knox sent General Washington another update:

"... the want of Snow detained us some days & now a cruel thaw, hinders from Crossing Hudson River which we are obliged to do four times from Lake George to this Town—the first severe night will make the Ice on the river sufficiently strong. Till that happens the Cannon & mortars must remain where they are most of them at the different crossing places & some few here—these inevitable delays pain Me exceedingly as my mind is fully sensible of the importance of the greatest expedition in this Case..."

At the end of Knox's journey, the weapons were temporarily stored in Framingham.





An officer, who served with Knox, wrote many years later,

"Young, robust, and vigorous, supported by an undaunted spirit, and a mind ever fruitful in resources, he commenced his mighty undertaking, almost unattended, in the winter of 1775, relying solely for the execution of his object, on such aid as he might procure from the thinly scattered inhabitants of the dreary region through which he had to pass. Every obstacle of season, roads and climate were surmounted by determined perseverance."

James Thacher, MD

*Military Journal during the American Revolutionary War*

Published 1823



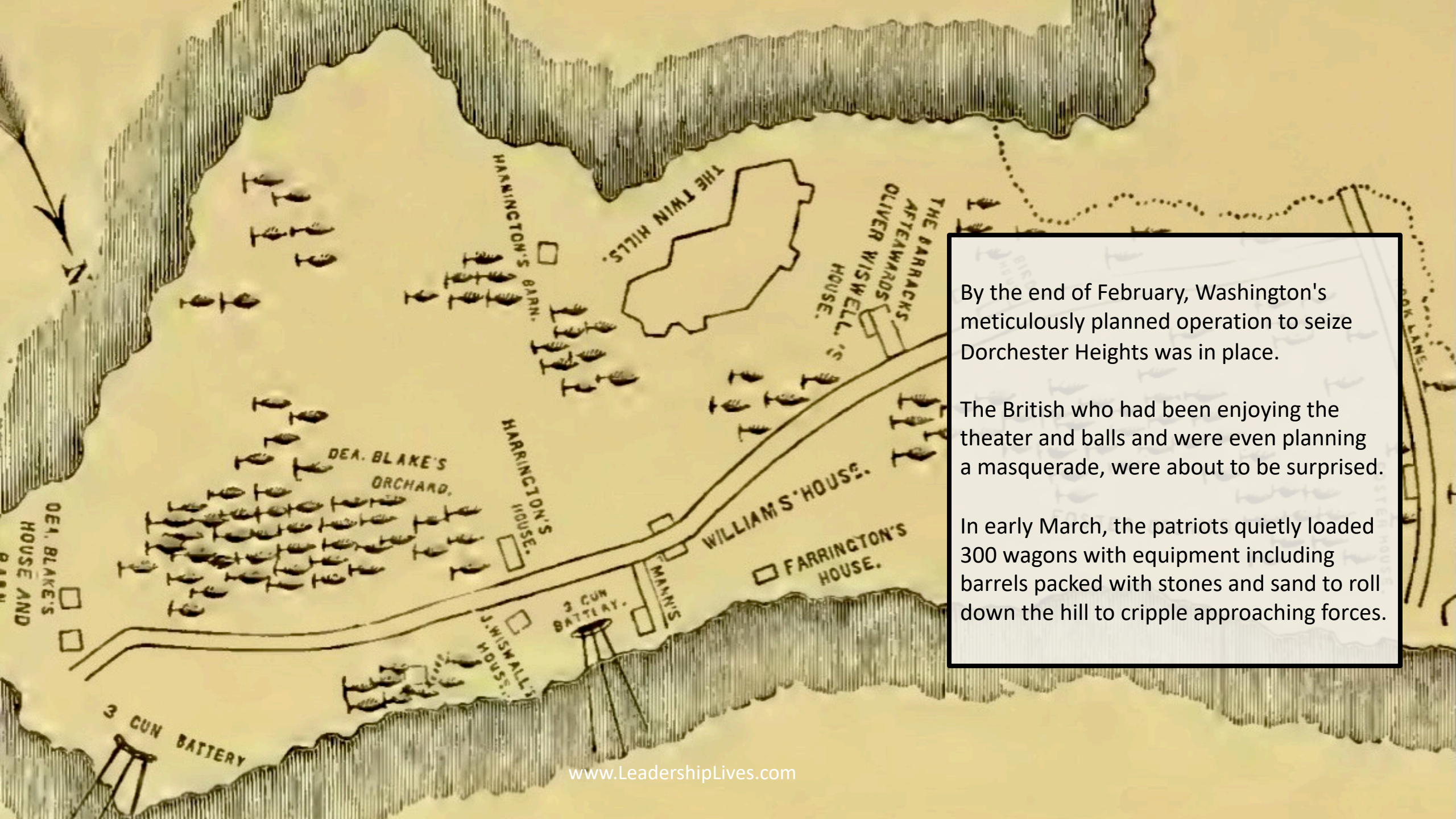


Almost two months after starting out, on January 24, 1776, Knox arrived in Framingham, MA with his cargo of 59 cannon, mortars and howitzers, 2300 lbs. of lead, and 1 barrel of flints.

Leaving everything under guard, and out of sight of the British, he hurried the last twenty miles to Washington's headquarters where he was greeted with a warm embrace from the General.

While Knox was away, his commission had arrived from John Hancock in Philadelphia. He was now a full colonel in the Continental Army.





By the end of February, Washington's meticulously planned operation to seize Dorchester Heights was in place.

The British who had been enjoying the theater and balls and were even planning a masquerade, were about to be surprised.

In early March, the patriots quietly loaded 300 wagons with equipment including barrels packed with stones and sand to roll down the hill to cripple approaching forces.



To distract the British from Dorchester Heights, on the night of March 4, 1776, the patriots used Knox's hard-won artillery to pound British positions from Roxbury, Lechmere Point, and Cobble Hill.

Throughout the long, dark hours, Washington rallied, exhorted, and encouraged his troops by pointing out it was the fifth anniversary of the Boston Massacre.

In the morning, the British were shocked to see what the patriots had achieved overnight. General Howe reportedly said, "The rebels have done more in one night than my whole army would have done in a month."

A British officer wrote home about the brand-new fortifications, "They were raised with an expedition equal to that of the Genii belonging to Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp."

General Howe gave orders to attack but by the time his troops were in position, a winter storm had blown up and the British were forced to retreat.





While the storm raged, the patriots continued to strengthen their bulwarks.

When the clouds finally cleared, the British army was at the mercy of the American forces. The navy's situation was precarious and loyalists – including Lucy's family - were panicking.

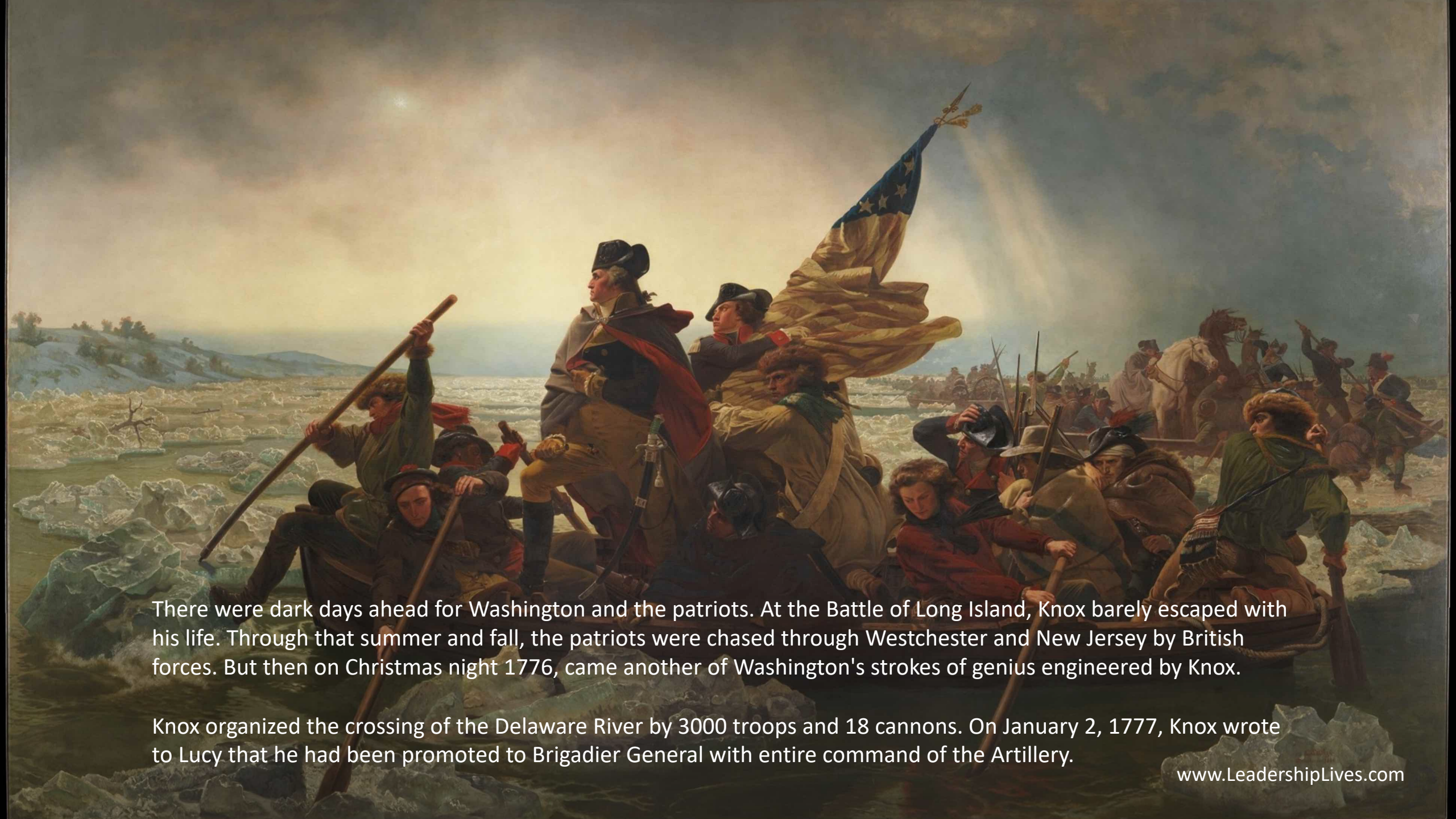
On March 8<sup>th</sup>, under a flag of truce, General Howe sent an unsigned, unaddressed letter to Roxbury. The letter was forwarded to Washington, who returned the letter unanswered via a colonel who conveyed an explanation.

The following night the patriots attempted to encroach on a British stronghold on the Boston Neck. The British fired on the patriots which prompted a fusillade from cannons at Roxbury, Cambridge, Lechmere Point, and Cobble Hill.

To the fury of General Howe – who threatened to torch the city - the British fleet, heavily weighed down with the army and loyalists, sailed from Boston on March 17, 1776.







There were dark days ahead for Washington and the patriots. At the Battle of Long Island, Knox barely escaped with his life. Through that summer and fall, the patriots were chased through Westchester and New Jersey by British forces. But then on Christmas night 1776, came another of Washington's strokes of genius engineered by Knox.

Knox organized the crossing of the Delaware River by 3000 troops and 18 cannons. On January 2, 1777, Knox wrote to Lucy that he had been promoted to Brigadier General with entire command of the Artillery.





Later that year, there was a turning point in the conflict when British General Burgoyne surrendered to General Horatio Gates at Saratoga on October 17, 1777. For the first time, it appeared possible that the scruffy patriots could triumph against the mighty British forces. The French soon joined the Americans as allies.



In early July 1781, the French commander of land forces, General Rochambeau, marched his 7000 troops 150 miles from Newport, RI to the Hudson River at Mt. Kisco, NY to join up with the patriots.

On 3 Aug. 1781, from a camp, near Dobbs Ferry, NY, Knox wrote to Lucy who had gone upstate with Lucy (5 years old) and Henry (fifteen months),

"Yesterday was your birthday. I cannot attempt to show you how much I was affected by it. I remembered it, and humbly petitioned Heaven to grant us the happiness of continuing our union until we should have the felicity of seeing our children flourishing around us, and ourselves crowned with virtue, peace, and years, and that we both might take our flight together, secure of a happy immortality.

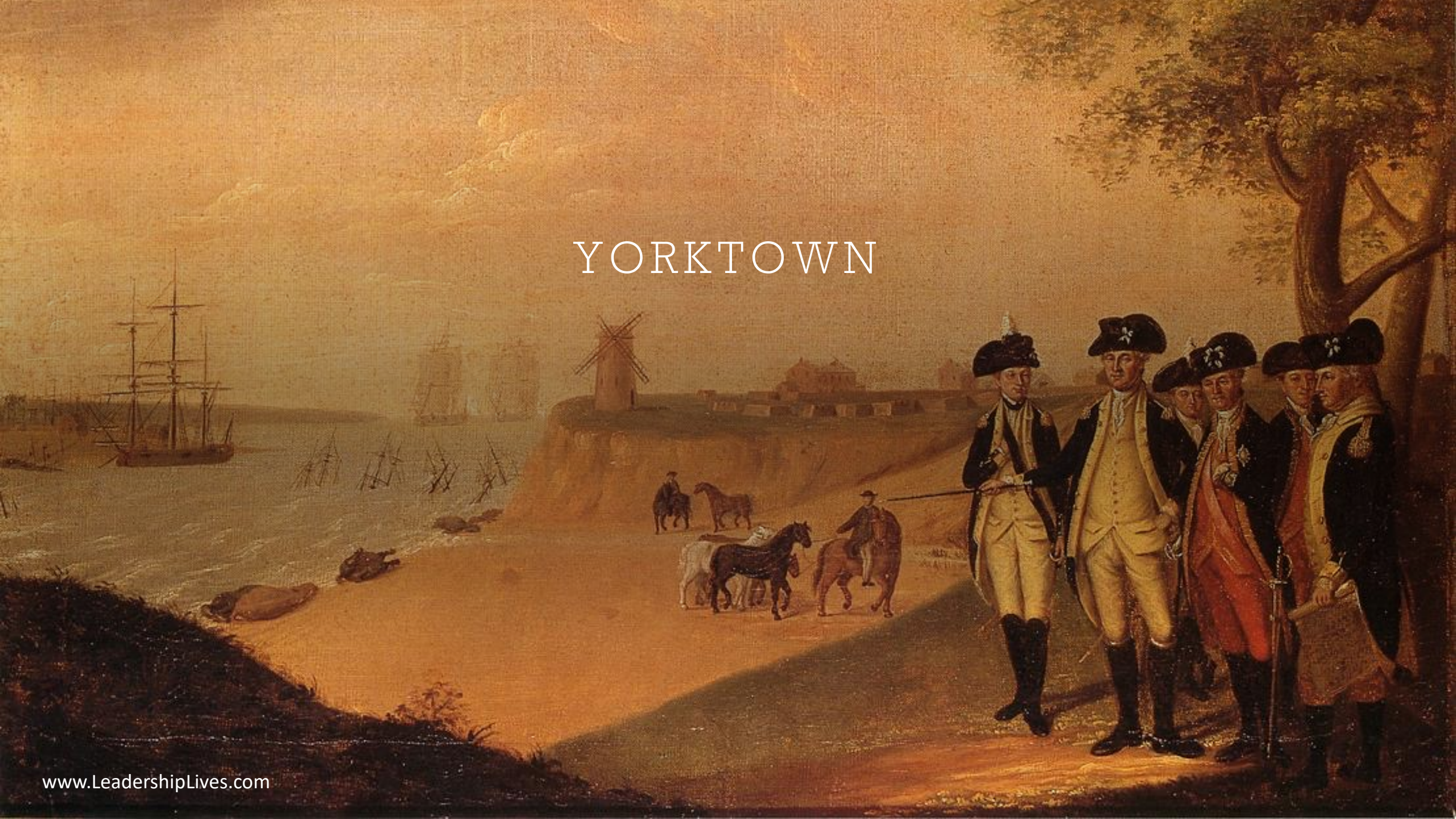
...All is harmony and good fellowship between the two armies. I have no doubt, when opportunity offers, that the zeal of the French and the patriotism of the Americans will go hand in hand to glory. I cannot explain to you the exact plan of the campaign: we don't know it ourselves. You know what we wish, but we hope more at present than we believe."



Lt. General Rochambeau  
Lafayette Square, Washington, DC  
Credit: Wikimedia / dbking (CC BY 2.0 Generic) (edited)



# YORKTOWN







In August, Washington learned that Lord Cornwallis's troops were now in Virginia and that the French fleet was sailing for the Chesapeake but would only remain in the area until October 15th.

Throwing up a decoy to mislead the British in New York, Washington and his French allies marched their troops 400 miles to Yorktown. Ultimately, 17,600 allied forces amassed in Yorktown.

Reaching Yorktown on September 14, Washington and Knox with General Rochambeau and Major General Chastellux boarded the *Ville de Paris* to coordinate a battle plan with Admiral de Grasse.

On September 5<sup>th</sup>, de Grasse had defeated the British in a naval battle at the Chesapeake Bay which prevented the British fleet from coming to Cornwallis's aid at Yorktown.





Knox has a red cockade in his hat which indicates his rank.

Pounded by Knox's artillery for three weeks, on October 19, 1781, Cornwallis, represented by his second-in-command, General Charles O'Hara, surrendered 7087 officers and men, 900 seamen, 144 cannons, 15 galleys, a frigate and 30 transport ships to Washington. The Revolutionary War was essentially over. The final treaty was ratified two years later in Paris.

On Washington's recommendation, Congress immediately promoted Knox to Major General, to the applause of the whole army.



In the years ahead, Knox was placed in charge of West Point to dissolve the army and oversaw the evacuation of New York City by British troops.

In the winter of 1783, at the darkest moment of Washington's career – a near mutiny by army officers over payment - Knox proposed a resolution to assure General Washington "that the officers reciprocated his affectionate expressions with the greatest sincerity of which the human heart is capable." Knox's resolution was unanimously approved.

Knox then proposed and founded The Society of the Cincinnati to perpetuate camaraderie among the officers of the American Revolution and their descendants.

For eleven years, Knox served as America's first Secretary of War. In 1795, at Lucy's urging, and to the great reluctance of President Washington, Knox retired to his home in Maine. He died there on October 26, 1806.







On December 4, 1783, a few days after the British evacuated New York, Washington arranged to say farewell to his officers at Fraunces Tavern on Pearl St. in lower Manhattan.

The dignified commander-in-chief was overwhelmed with emotion. Filling a glass with wine, he toasted his officers saying, "With a heart full of love and gratitude, I now take leave of you. I most devoutly wish that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable." Then he added, "I cannot come to each of you but shall feel obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand."

General Knox was standing nearest to him. Looking at Knox, Washington's eyes filled with tears. Memories of the "noble train of artillery," the freezing night on the Delaware River, battles at Trenton, Princeton, Monmouth and Yorktown flooded his mind. Unable to speak, he embraced Knox and then did the same to every other officer in the room.

Without a word being spoken, they all marched to the Whitehall wharf where Washington boarded a barge and waved a final goodbye.





"TO MOURN THE LOSS OF SUCH A MAN NEEDS NO AFFECTATION.  
TO SPEAK HIS PRAISES REQUIRES NO FLATTERY.  
HIS VIRTUES ASK NO EMBELLISHMENT..."

EULOGY DELIVERED OCTOBER 28, 1806  
BY SAMUEL THATCHER, MEMBER, U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES