

Born in Boston, he was the seventh son of William Knox, a Scotch ship-master living in the city. Employed in 1762 in a bookshop, by 1771 he opened a bookshop of his own.

Quick to throw his lot in with the patriot cause, he studied books on military art, questioned British officers stationed in Boston, and joined a corps, becoming second in command of a military group of grenadiers.

1774 he was married to Lucy Flucker, daughter of a Loyalist, but this did not prevent him from joining the Colonial army in the spring of 1775.

He fought the battle of Bunker Hill, as aide of General Ward, and then aided in the construction of defenses of the camps around Boston. Needing heavy artillery for the army, Knox proposed his Ticonderoga trip to Washington. In November of 1775 he set out for the fort and in the face of great difficulties he succeeded in getting guns, loaded on sleds, boxes of lead and barrels of flints to Cambridge in safety by January 1776.

He then received his commission as colonel of one artillery regiment. The cannonade of Knox's batteries enabled General Thomas to take possession of Dorchester Heights which resulted in the evacuation of Boston by the British.

That summer of 1776 he was stationed in New York City with Washington who found him a true friend and able officer. By December he was appointed a brigadier-general.

He distinguished himself in the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth. He helped General Greene in planning the defenses of the Hudson River, and with his young wife was at Valley Forge the trying winter of 1777-8.

He rendered valuable service in the operations against Cornwallis in October 1781, and was praised by the Frenchman De Chastellax.

Made Major General in 1782, he was appointed to the command at West Point. Upon him was rested the delicate task of disbanding the army late in 1783.

He had already formed the Society of the Sons of Cincinnati to keep alive the friendships of officers formed during the war.

Congress appointed Knox Secretary of War (1785) and he filled this position for ten years. In 1794 he was also appointed head of the Navy Department, just organized.

Owing to insufficient salary, he resigned from Washington's Cabinet (1795) and spent his remaining years on his estate, Montpelier, near Thomaston, Maine.