The Real George Washington

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT

David McCullough
On the Man Behind the Miracle of 1776
IN THE COLD FIRST WEEKS of the year, the commander in chief of the Continental Army was close to despair. George Washington is usually depicted as the most interchangeable of the founders—tall, cool, courageous. In our national mythology, he seems to have been born for immortality and destined for veneration, but late on these winter nights, headquartered in a iframe by the Charles River in Massachusetts, Washington was suffused with gloom. As David McCullough tells it in his new book, “1776,” there were too few soldiers and too few guns; the American experiment might be over before it really even began.
The selection upon my situation and that of this age produce many an uneasy hour when all around me are wriggled in sleep. Washington wrote, 'few know the publick work."

And few Americans in the first years of the 20th century have fully appreciated the complex character of the man who made us possible. For generations he has been the most despised of the Founders, but we are now in the midst of discovering the real Washington. Last year brought Joseph Ellis's best-selling "Life of the Party," and next week McCallough, America's best-loved historian, publishes his own account of Washington and the Continental Army that NEWSWEEK excerpts in the following pages.

1776 is vintage McCallough: colorful, eloquent, and illuminating. In reconstructing that epic year in the life of the American Revolution, he has given us a fresh portrait of Washington himself. Promos to still abate and fashions of self-pity Washington condescend. As New Englanders, obsessed over the smallest details of decorum at Mt. Vernon, worry for him. A
If you know history, you know there is no self-made woman. We are shaped by people.
With four children and another on the way, it was not an easy decision. "Mother's courage at that time was crucial," he says. "If she had been 'my mother, I don't know if I would have done it.'

There were lists of his future earnings. Reader's Digest took "The Jamestown Docks" as a condensed book, the initial payment of $10,000. McCullough says, "truly changed my life."

They settled on the Vineyard full time in 1972 after paying $6,000 down on a farm house, put in a farmyard, built the writing studio and went to work. "You could live on the Vineyard for almost nothing then," he says, "which was good, because then what I was making."

Still, things were cambiar. When McCullough would be asked to speak at colleges in those early years, his Bernstein father would say, "Sure, maybe they'll hire you for a job.

And I don't have a better job." The books were sold by the N. C. Wyeth-Herter edition of his book "The Dawning Island" had the gift of story in his bones, and translated that passion to creating and designing books and biographies. In 1952, with the monumental "Tom All," McCullough won the first of his two Pulitzer Prizes for the book in 2003 after "Old Man's Island," and with that book, he "renewed my faith in myself and my ability to do this.

The next project? "Unclear right now, but I will find the answer soon enough. I always have. "I have faith in me."

The boy who was discovered at the age of 8 growing up in the 1960s was a voracious reader. He "was reading a lot of books, the kind that are staples today, but not the kind that are staples now." He "was reading about adventure, about discovery, about a country that was new and exciting."
PRONE TO DOUBT, GEORGE WASHINGTON NEVER LOST FAITH, BEHIND HIS MASK OF COMMAND.

BY DAVID MCCULLOUGH

ON FIRST ARRIVING IN CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, TO TAKE COMMAND OF THE CONTINENTAL ARMY IN MIDSUMMER, THE FORTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD GEORGE WASHINGTON moved into one of the largest, most elegant houses in town, a gray clapboard Georgian mansion half a mile from the college on the King's Highway. Three stories tall, with an unobstructed view of the Charles River, it belonged to a wealthy Loyalist who, fearing for his life and the lives of his family, had abandoned the place, its furnishings, and all, to take refuge in Boston. For Washington, who had a fondness for handsome architecture and fine views, the house suited perfectly. His office established in a drawing room off the front hall.

The house became a hive of activity. It was there that Washington conferred with his...
WASHINGTON HAD NEVER LED AN ARMY IN BATTLE, AND NEVER BEFORE COMMANDED ANYTHING LARGER THAN A REGIMENT.
STORIES WERE TOLD OF HIS EXTRAORDINARY FEATS OF STRENGTH. HE THREW A STONE FROM A STREAM TO A HEIGHT OF 215 FEET.
Washington was quite aware of his limitations. To his wife Martha he wrote that "for them seeking this appointment, I have unutterable patience, many power to sorrow, not only from its natural appeal to one and the family but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my capacity... it has been a kind of blessing that there was no appointment for me." Yet he had assured Congress in his speech blue andbuff uniform, conscripting a readiness to take command.

If he were responsible for any success for his ability, it was because he had a realistic idea of how immense that responsibility would be. For such a task, to lead an experienced, patriotic armed volunteer force of unruly and treacherous against the long-entrenched, better equipped, formidable military force on earth—and with as much as nine months to rear his force, in reality, there was no man qualified for it.

**The awe-inspiring aspects of Washington's character,**

**his genius for war, and his ability to motivate his men, are considered to be key in his success.**

In August 1776, the British suffered a significant loss at the Battle of Long Island. Washington, now leading a larger force, was ready to face the British again.

**His WEALTH and WAY of LIFE impressed his MEN. But some found it odd that the CAUSE of LIBERTY was led by a SLAVEMASTER.**

Washington's prosperity was vast, and his wealth was significant. His manors were well-maintained, and his lifestyle was lavish. Some wondered if a man who owned slaves could lead a country to freedom.

**CHRISTMAS DAY THE WEATHER TURNED CROOKED. A howling storm was gathering. The tidewater area was hit hard.**

In the course of the day, Congressman and President Benjamin Franklin had a private meeting with Washington. Franklin asked if Washington was "much depressed."

"In affecting terms," Washington replied, "I fear the fate of the state."

As they talked, Washington kept urging something with his pen on small pieces of paper. When one of them fell to the floor by Franklin's feet, he saw what was written: "We are dying."

Washington crossed out some parts and put his name on the page. Franklin understood.

**After drawing the storm from New Jersey state, about eleven o'clock, the storm struck, a howling wind, a howling wind, a howling wind!**

As the storm swept from Rehoboth, Washington's dotting notes were carried away. The storm swirled, relentlessly, as the lightning struck. Washington didn't seem to notice it.

**As the dotting stopped, it was twelve o'clock, three hours behind schedule, before the last of the troops, horses, and cannon were under.**

At that point the attacks might have been called off, if the man was back on the front, since the entire plan revolved on the element of surprise and the chances of surprise now seemed gone. Washington rode, as he later said John Hancock, "to push on at all costs!"

The march south from Valley Forge was for many the most harrowing part of the night. The storm grew worse, winds drifted down the river, snow, snow, and violent hail. There was little light at all.

A low, gray winter lantern, and torches were mounted on some of the beams. The horses kept stepping and shuddering in the dark.

**Washington's order to the general said:**

"Tell the people to stand up. They have stood up in ten hours..."

**Hushed by soldiers that kept sleeping over the Americans, four of whom had established camps beyond the borders and another that might be a new company sleep with their modern rifles to be called out as a man's weapons, and they were called, to come on more...**

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He kept writing on small pieces of paper, one fell to the floor. A visitor saw what it said: 'Victory or Death.'