

Author David McCullough Discusses the Battle of Brooklyn

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General Information

Source:	NBC Nightly News	Resource Type:	Video News Report
Creator:	Brian Williams	Copyright:	© NBC Universal, Inc.
Event Date:	1776	Copyright Date:	2005
Air/Publish Date:	05/24/2005	Clip Length	00:03:45

Description

Author David McCullough discusses what Brooklyn, New York was like during the years of the American Revolution. His book, "1776" chronicles the battles that took place in and around New York City as well as the rest of the military campaign of 1776.

Keywords

American Revolution, War of Independence, David McCullough, 1776, Battle of Brooklyn, George Washington, New York, Manhattan, Brooklyn, New York Harbor, Greenwood Cemetery, Continental Army, British troops, British Prison Ships, POWs, Prisoners of War, Thirteen Colonies, Liberty, Freedom, Independence, Retreat, Book, Author, Historian

Transcript

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BRIAN WILLIAMS (anchor): Our nightly journal concerns a new book in bookstores starting today. It's the work of an author who has already taught so much history to so many Americans. He's about to do it again. It is a story about how close the American Revolution and its leader George Washington came to total failure were it not for a near military miracle where a New York landmark stands today. He may be the only man alive who is able to climb to the top of the Brooklyn Bridge and make 230 years completely

disappear. Do you really have the ability to look at Brooklyn Heights and not see elevated expressways and apartment buildings?

DAVID MCCULLOUGH (author, 1776): I do, yes, because I am so marinated in what it was like then. You get to the point where you can almost can make the jump into that other time.

WILLIAMS: David McCullough wrote the book on the Brooklyn Bridge along with seven others including Truman and John Adams, both Pulitzer winners. His newest is the story of the pivotal year 1776. And the Revolution that would have ended in Brooklyn if it were not for a fog bank that allowed George Washington's troops to retreat across the river to Manhattan.

MCCULLOUGH: I think it would have been all over if the British had stopped that retreat, I think that would have ended of it.

WILLIAMS: Our second stop, the highest point in Brooklyn, which is today Greenwood Cemetery, home of one of New York's great geographic secrets. The lady atop this memorial to the soldiers of 1776 is looking right into the eyes of another lady all the way across the harbor.

MCCULLOUGH: This was all thick forest. This was dense woods and you can see how high up we are. So this was almost wilderness mountain fighting right nearby our great city.

WILLIAMS: And not far away the 148 foot high tower visible from Manhattan, marks the crypt the contains the remains of 10,000 POWs on the U.S. side who died on board British prison ships in New York Harbor.

MCCULLOUGH: And they died from disease, they died from starvation. It was one of the worst atrocities imaginable. And they would be buried by prisoner burial parties in the sand along the shore. And for years the bones and remains were washing up.

WILLIAMS: Back in 1908 20,000 people showed up for the dedication. The fact that today's visitors to this park are more dedicated to basketball worries this lover of U.S. history and landmarks.

MCCULLOUGH: I believe that when someone is writing history or studying history we ought to go to the places where events took place. We should take our children and our grandchildren there. Don't wait for the school trip to answer that need. We need to embrace the past as part of the present and part of the ground we walk on.

WILLIAMS: And back on the great bridge there was this scene: School children on an outing assigned to draw what they saw.

MCCULLOUGH: Where are you from?

WILLIAMS: They didn't know who the nice man was with a head of white hair. But thanks to one sharp-eyed dad with a sharp pencil, one lucky child's masterpiece is now signed by an American master. David McCullough, one of America's great and most prolific writers who is just as prolific in life. Married 50 years, father of 5, grandfather of 17, and for him family is a source of more pride than any book he's ever written.

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