



## BARRY BOSTWICK CANNOT TELL A LIE

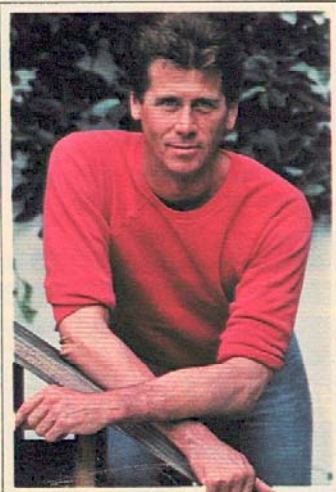
To prepare for his role as George Washington, the actor says he even went so far as to consult his analyst and a psychic

By Neil Hickey

Utterly resplendent in black cape, cocked hat, tan breeches, riding boots and gold-buttoned tunic, Barry Bostwick stood on a windy hillock at Valley Forge, Pa., on the very spot where George Washington encamped with his tattered army in the winter of 1777-78.

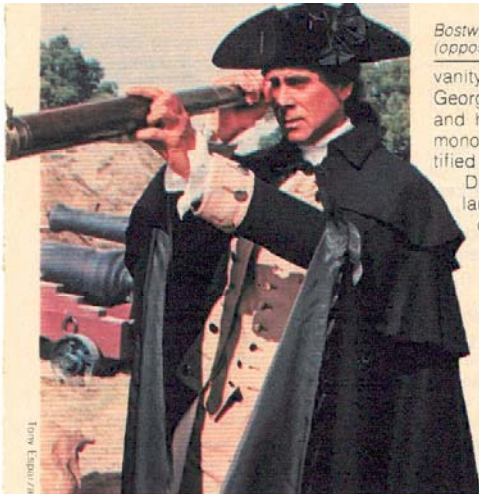
"He fought demons daily through his life," Bostwick was saying. "There was a sense of doom about the man. He was often depressed. His mother, you know, was a terrible complainer and always belittled him.

And Washington, reflecting his mother's attitude toward him, was often afflicted with terrible self-doubt. Martha, in a sense, was the mother he never had. We don't really know the nature of the relationship between George and Martha, partly be-



cause she burned all the letters between them. He was not a well-educated man, but he had a great sense of theatricality. He knew the image was important. Here was this giant, a foot taller than everybody else, on the biggest horse he could find, wearing glamorous uniforms he had designed himself. He was an extremely astute political animal at an early age. He was part mystic, although he might not have known it. He never talked about God, but he had a strong sense of Providence. In his discipline, he became monk-like. He meditated upon the creation of a country. Someone has said he was like a bishop at prayer. He had such a powerful spirit that I feel he's still around."

Standing there in the December chill,



Tom Egan/77

Bostwick (left) in command as Washington and (opposite page) at ease

vanity, ambition, despair and charisma of George Washington; and of breathing life and humanity into the Mount Rushmore monolith whose stern aloofness has mystified Americans for 200 years.

During the filming, Bostwick remained largely secluded from the rest of the cast and crew—to study lines, research the Revolution and read piles of books about Washington—and he regrets that such reclusiveness was necessary. "Here was a chance to make new friends. They were always going out to eat together, going to the movies. For me, there just wasn't time." His mobile home/dressing room became almost a shrine, with photos, busts, books, articles and other reminders of Washington everywhere on view.

He sat amid that clutter one day in boots, breeches and brown peruke—waiting to be summoned for his next scene—and mused about his preparations for the role. "I went to the Library of Congress, sat in a private conference room, and was allowed to read Washington's journals and manuscripts—even the copybooks he kept as a young boy. I watched his handwriting style grow. The accounts he kept! This man was incredible! Down to the penny, he knew what he was spending as a landowner at Mount Vernon. He kept journals for years about the daily weather; about how many chickens were bought, how many seeds, how many bricks. In his heart and soul, he was a farmer."

Bostwick spent long hours with Washington biographer James Thomas Flexner extracting insights about the period and the person. He grilled the curators at Mount Vernon and Colonial Williamsburg. He even had "a couple of sessions with my shrink about what Washington was like"—some of which analysis was conducted on the phone ("It wasn't cheap") between Virginia and California. What can a Beverly Hills "shrink" contribute to one's perceptions of George Washington? "A lot," says Barry Bostwick. "That's where I →

only hours away from the final shot of a \$20-million eight-hour CBS miniseries. Bostwick showed in his face the fatigue of an arduous four-month shooting schedule in which he was required to portray the father of his country from ages 19 to 51—one of the most demanding roles, physically and artistically, ever undertaken by a television actor—with meticulous attention to historical accuracy and to the spirit of the Nation's most renowned and least understood figure.

Four hundred pages in the massive script, with George Washington in almost every scene... location shooting at Washington's Mount Vernon home, Colonial Williamsburg, Valley Forge and Philadelphia... legions of historians, curators, military experts and guardians of 18th-century American culture... hundreds of technicians, costumers, cosmeticians, extras and a blue-chip cast of actors: Patty Duke Astin (as Martha Washington), James Mason, Jaclyn Smith, Trevor Howard, Lloyd Bridges, Hal Holbrook... and at the epicenter of all that, the slender, 6-foot-4 frame of a 38-year-old sometime song-and-dance man who'd been handed the epochal mission of personifying the grandeur, frailty, passion,

Crew Travel

got the insights about Washington's mother's influence—and about George's passionate infatuation with Sally Fairfax (played by Jaclyn Smith), the wife of Washington's best friend.

So determined was Bostwick to penetrate the core of George Washington that he visited a psychic in Santa Barbara whom, he'd been told, Washington had "spoken through." Bostwick believed that Washington's "energy and power were so great that in some way he was still in the world."

The psychic "went into a trance state," Bostwick recalls, "and her spirit guide spoke through her—a spirit entity with the ability to connect with her and make her a conduit for the information. Her voice changed, her face changed. I would ask her questions, and the answers came back in this other voice."

**What did he find out?** "Simple things. She said Washington had a slight limp from an accident. That fact had shown up nowhere in my research. But then in an obscure source I learned that a horse had once fallen on him—an accident that would have caused such a limp.

"She said that I should not view Washington's love for Sally in terms of contemporary morality—that he would not have acted on his love. And that's the way we're playing it."

The psychic also told Bostwick he'd have to overcome his own "contemporaneity," and learn to move, stand and sit in a different way. "She was right. My natural physical style is one of activity. But with Washington, there was no extraneous movement. There was a simplicity and centeredness. The hardest thing for me to overcome was my natural sense of levity. But he had a gravity, a bearing."

And she advised Bostwick during the séance (which he videotaped) to be careful about his costuming. Washington revealed in his wardrobe and was inordinately concerned with the style and fit of his clothes. "That's all true," Bostwick confirms. "He ordered his clothes from England. By the time he was well-established socially, he dressed beautifully."

Consulting psychics is not Barry Bostwick's habit, but it's part and parcel nonetheless of a character trait that's central to his nature—namely, a deep spirituality that touches every aspect of his life. A half-dozen years ago, he adopted the practice of daily meditation and estimates that he has meditated every single day since. ("He's very serious about that part of his life," says Henry Bostwick, the actor's father, who is the outgoing, well-spoken, politically well-connected general manager of the San Mateo County Development Association in Northern California. "He didn't get it from his mother and me. We didn't pound religion into him.")

Says Barry Bostwick: "Yes, I consider myself a spiritual person, more so than a religious one. It's based on an instinct, a sense of connection with an outside power, which, if you choose to tap into it, enlarges your vision. It's not the worship of any particular symbol, but more a growing conviction that one is not alone." The daily meditation "has been most influential in my work," says Bostwick. "It has cleared me of a lot of self-doubt." Years ago, he lived briefly at the spiritual community of Findhorn in the north of Scotland, and also made a pilgrimage to the nearby Isle of Iona, which, he says, has been a powerfully mystical site since the sixth century. His desire for spiritual development is not a subject he talks about much. "It's become so much a part of me that it's difficult to express."

**Eight years ago, his older brother died in an auto accident, and the trauma to Bostwick was such that he suspects it helped set him on the search for answers that he still pursues, and caused him to confront his own mortality.**

His upbringing was vaguely Episcopalian, upper-middle-class Californian. "He has great allegiance to family," says Henry Bostwick. "Fortunately, from the start, his head has been screwed on right. He has good perspective. The success he's had hasn't gone to his head. He's a gentleman, which he was trained to be."

The bare facts: a professional stage →

debut while still a sophomore (United States International University School of Performing Arts in San Diego) in "Take Her, She's Mine," with Walter Pidgeon; further study at the New York University Graduate School of the Arts; a Broadway debut in Sean O'Casey's "Cock-a-Do-doodle-Do"; numerous off-Broadway plays by writers such as Jean Genet and Collette; a major Broadway success as Danny Zuko in the long-running musical "Grease," for which he won a Tony Award nomination; and a second Tony nomination for "They Knew What They Wanted." In 1978, he won the Tony as best actor for his role in "The Robber Bridegroom."

But Bostwick is best known to millions of movie fans for his performance as Brad Majors, the quintessential middle-American, in the midnight cult movie "The Rocky Horror Picture Show"; and as the hooper-songwriter-singer in "Movie, Movie" (with George C. Scott), an affectionate and hilarious spoof of 1930s flicks. TV watchers know him best as Spider Elliot in "Scruples," and as silent-film star John Gilbert in "Moviola."

**That kind of success has left no time for marriage, although he and Lisa Hartman of "Knots Landing" lived together for several years in his Beverly Hills house, an arrangement that ended recently. He's not certain he's quite ready for full emotional commitment just yet. "There have been a lot of ladies," he says. "Hopefully, I haven't hurt many people along the way."**

Meanwhile, he's building a new house on a piece of land he bought in Bel Air. (He also maintains in New York an 1890s Bowery loft that once housed a gambling casino and brothel.) And he pursues his hobby: restoring 1950s Mercedes automobiles of which he now owns eight. Other interests: he's a certified scuba diver, a sculptor and a "binge exerciser."

Bostwick wasn't the first choice to play George Washington. Jon Voight was. By the time (last July) that Bostwick showed up to audition, the organizers of the "George Washington" project—David Gerber, the executive producer; producer/

writer Richard Fielder, and director Buzz Kulik—were growing visibly nervous because shooting was scheduled to begin on Aug. 8 and they still hadn't found their George Washington. They'd interviewed about 30 actors on both coasts, some well known, some unknown.

Fielder recalls: "Barry came in and read several scenes, and his reading was a revelation. Suddenly, by God, he looked like the man we were searching for."

**On the windswept hillocks of Valley Forge, as the "George Washington" crew was preparing to disband, Fielder talked about Bostwick's wholehearted attack upon the role. "It's a case of an actor having found his destiny. Picking him for the role was such a critical choice; we could afford to make a mistake in casting any other role, but if our choice for Washington was wrong, the ballgame would have been over. But Barry was born to play George Washington. He has grown into the role so much it's eerie." In the scene where Washington says farewell to his troops after the war, "Barry's tears were real," Fielder recalled. "He had to sit down and get himself together before he could go on."**

"Barry is giving Washington back to the people," Fielder adds. "Flexner has helped fill him with a sense of the man. And Barry and Patty Duke Astin have spent hours talking about the relationship of George and Martha."

And how does the burden of such a challenging TV role rest upon the slender frame of Barry Bostwick, cult hero of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show"? One night in Williamsburg, early in the filming, Bostwick pondered that question. "In a way, to save my own sanity, I can't think this is as big a part as it really is. If I had that in my head all the time, the responsibility would be overwhelming. I have to consider it just a wonderful opportunity to act."

He shook his head and sighed. "Still, it's not just another TV show. This is probably the only time Washington will get this kind of attention on film. Nobody will make another one." **END**