THE EXPEDITION OF CAPTAIN ROBERT STOBO
An address before the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

ROBERT C. ALBERTS

This story begins in Pittsburgh in 1854, long after the events we are to deal with had ended. In that year, a man with two good Pittsburgh names, Neville B. Craig, published a little volume. The title page reads: "Memoirs of Major Robert Stobo, of the Virginia Regiment. Arma Virumque. Pittsburgh: Published by John S. Davidson, No. 65 Market Street. Printed at the Office of Kennedy's Bank Note Review, Third St. 1854."

Some years earlier, Craig, who was the "Mr. Western Pennsylvania History" of his day, had come across copies of two remarkable letters that Robert Stobo had smuggled out of Fort Duquesne in 1754 while he was a hostage of the French. Craig wrote in the introduction to the Memoirs: "From the first reading of these letters, (this) writer . . . was seized with an anxious, longing desire to know more about the high-spirited, self-sacrificing patriot and soldier who wrote them."

In his search for information, Craig had obtained from the British Museum a manuscript copy of the 20,000-word work, Memoirs of Major Robert Stobo. This had been written by some unknown person who obviously knew Stobo, but it was not published in Stobo's...
lifetime. It was printed, obscurely, in London in 18001 and not again until Craig's edition of 1854, and not since then.

Since Craig's time, in Pittsburgh and elsewhere, a number of people have been consumed by this "anxious, longing desire" to know more about Robert Stobo. The list of contemporaries is a long one. It includes, among many others, Stanton Belfour of this Society; and Austin Wright of the English Department at Carnegie Tech; and Lawrence Woods of the insurance company that bears his name. It includes George Coupe, a Dravo Corporation engineer; George Swetnam of the Pittsburgh Press, and George Kahrl, a professor at Elmira College. It includes Robert Alter, a writer of boys' books in Altadena, California, and Robert Alberts, an amateur historian in Pittsburgh.

One Pittsburgher, however, had a consuming interest that was stronger than any of the others. This was the dean of Stobo enthusiasts, Mrs. C. V. Starrett, editor-director of the University of Pittsburgh Press. More years ago than she would want me to reveal, Agnes Starrett set out to do a really serious scholarly job of research on Stobo. She traveled to Canada and for the first time translated the key French documents in this story. She located and corresponded with Stobo's collateral descendants in Canada and Australia. She put a professional researcher on Stobo's trail in London. All in all, she did a splendid job of research.

I must tell one story concerning Mrs. Starrett's researches that she has told on herself. She was in the archives building in Montreal, and the little goateed curator there showed her the Fort Necessity Capitulation Paper. She said to him: "Oh, I am so excited. May I touch it?" The curator expressed surprise at this emotion. Agnes said, "George Washington signed this. Villiers signed it. This is a thrilling document." At this the curator said, looking over his glasses, "In that case, dear Madame, do press it to your bosom."

In the fall of 1961, American Heritage commissioned me to write Stobo's story for an issue of that magazine.2 I called on Mrs. Starrett with a complicated proposal that she reduced to simple terms:

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1 Memoirs of Major Robert Stobo, of the Virginia Regiment. London. Printed by J. Skirven, Ratcliff-Highway, MDCCC. References to the Memoirs in these notes are to the Craig edition of 1854.
she would give me access to the material she had gathered.

This, of course, was a most generous act. I think she did it out of love for Robert Stobo. In any case, I am happy to acknowledge my debt to her and to thank her before this audience, both for making the material available and for encouragement she gave me in the work that followed.

Robert Stobo was born in 1727 in Glasgow, Scotland, the only son of a prosperous merchant who died when Robert was thirteen. He studied the classics for two years at the University of Glasgow and then, on the death of his mother when he was fifteen, his guardians sent him to Virginia to learn the trade of factor or commission merchant. Much of the trade in Virginia was being handled by Scots at this time, and Scots dominated the business, political and army life in an extraordinary way.

Five years later, at twenty, Stobo returned to Glasgow, sold most of his inherited property, and returned to Virginia with a shipload of merchandise that would sell in the Colonies at about twice what he paid for it. He set himself up as an independent merchant in Petersburg, Virginia, which was a center for Scots merchants and a clearing house for tobacco and other trade commodities.

The Memoirs describes Stobo as a young man about five feet, ten inches tall, with a dark complexion, a penetrating eye, an aquiline nose, and a cheerful round face. He seems to have enjoyed himself in Petersburg and Williamsburg. He became a protégé of the new Governor, Robert Dinwiddie, who was a fellow-Scot from Glasgow. He had a turn for gaiety, became a favorite of the “best company” of the Province, opened his house to everybody, and neglected his business to have a good time.

In the winter of 1753-54, George Washington returned from his mission to Fort Le Boeuf with word that the French had covetous designs on the Ohio Valley, and Governor Dinwiddie organized a small army to head off their advance. Stobo volunteered for this service and in February, 1754, he was commissioned a captain in Washington's militia regiment. For reasons that are not clear, he was made regimental engineer.

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3 Memoirs, 13, 14.
4 The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728 to 1858, ed. by W. Innes Addison, Glasgow, 1913.
5 Memoirs, 14.
6 Stobo's identification with Petersburg is established by testimony he gave at his trial in Montreal. See below.
7 Memoirs, 17.
Stobo was eager to follow an adventurous military career, but he had no desire to suffer any undue hardships in following it. He hired ten servant-mechanics to accompany him to war, including a blacksmith complete with forge, and several expert hunters to supply him with game. He loaded a wagon that was (in the words of the Memoirs) "well filled with every necessary proper to make these mountainous woody deserts as agreeable as their situation would admit." Among the necessaries was a cask containing 126 gallons of good Madeira wine. It is not hard to imagine the enthusiasm with which Stobo was welcomed by his fellow-officers when he arrived in the frontier town of Winchester on May 9th.

A few weeks later Stobo marched his company to Wills Creek and then on over the Endless Mountains to join Washington at Fort Necessity. On July 3rd, Washington and his 300 effective troops fought and lost a famous battle against a French and Indian army three times as large. In this battle, Stobo distinguished himself, and his company had the heaviest casualties of any of the five Virginia companies involved. Washington signed an honorable capitulation that permitted him to retire back over the mountains. You will recall that a few weeks earlier, Washington had captured twenty-one French prisoners in defeating Ensign Jumonville. Now he agreed to give over two of his captains as hostages to guarantee return of those French prisoners to Fort Duquesne.

One of the hostage captains was Jacob Van Braam, a Dutchman who had served as Washington's interpreter on the trip to Fort Le Boeuf a few months earlier. The other was Captain Robert Stobo.

Now, it seems to me that what happened at Fort Duquesne after Stobo arrived there would be of primary interest to this audience. Therefore, I would like to offer you, from Chapter 8 of a book I have written on Stobo, a re-creation of the events that began on the morning after the two hostages arrived at the fort:

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10 Three main sources of information make it possible to recreate in some detail the events at Fort Duquesne during the summer of 1754. These are: the hitherto ignored trial testimony of Stobo and Van Braam; Stobo's two letters smuggled out of Fort Duquesne; and the letters in Papiers Contrecœur. The fort is minutely described in Charles M. Stotz, Defense
In a calmer day, in Petersburg, Robert Stobo had read the sentences in George Washington's published Journal that described the Forks of the Ohio: "I spent some time in viewing the rivers and the land in the fork; which I think extremely well situated for a fort, as it has the absolute command of both rivers. The land at the point is 20 or 25 feet above the common surface of the water; and a considerable bottom of flat, well-timbered land all around it, very convenient for building; the rivers are each a quarter of a mile, or more, across." At this place the French, with immense labor, had built their fort; Captain Contrecoeur had named it Fort Duquesne; and here Stobo found himself on the morning of Monday, July 8, 1754.

He was keenly aware that he and his fellow-hostage, Jacob Van Braam, were the first Englishmen to see this French outpost. He believed that within a few weeks he would be dining in the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, describing to Robert Dinwiddie, and perhaps to Colonel Washington and Colonel Innes, exactly what he had observed.

He walked across the small interior parade ground and mounted one of the walls... The fort was square, about 80 feet to a side, with bastions projecting at each corner, and was surrounded by a deep dry ditch about twelve feet wide... On the flat ground east of the fort, dotted with stumps of newly cut trees, stood some 60 bark cabins for troops and junior officers. A path, which he learned was called L'Allée de la Vierge, led past the cabins, past a kitchen garden, past grazing animals, to a small graveyard. Cornfields extended about a half mile up the bank of each river. The French Indians were quartered in some 30 cabins in an area of their own. He saw with interest that they entered and left the fort as they pleased...

At some time during the day, Stobo and Van Braam were taken before the commandant. Captain Contrecoeur was all amiability. Both men, he said through his interpreter, would be quartered throughout their stay in a room within the fort, but they would have the freedom of the camp until they were exchanged, or until he found reason to revoke their privileges... He spoke of the deep French love of peace and of his strong desire to maintain good relations between their two countries. At the same time, he deplored the English action of sending armed troops into territories which were universally known to belong

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*in the Wilderness,* Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1958. A contemporary description by John McKinney, a prisoner in 1756, is found in the *Contrecoeur Papers* facing 231.
to His Most Christian Majesty and had been occupied by Frenchmen for more than a century. The two captains were then dismissed.  

In the week that followed, Van Braam fell into a pattern of passing his days and evenings in the cabins of the French officers, hard at a never-ending game of cards. Stobob, on the other hand, spent hours prowling and pacing about the fort, until there was scarcely a part of it he was not familiar with. He undertook to learn French . . . . He wandered among the Indians, talking with them as best he could, listening to the gossip and rumors, and employing them, as was the custom, to mend his shoes and make him various garments of fur and deerskin . . . .

And then several things happened to jolt Captain Stobo out of his daily routine.

While walking among the Indian cabins one day, he heard his name called. He wheeled and saw a group of soldiers from the Virginia Regiment — eight of them — under guard of several French Indians. Among them were Graves and Morris — the two men from his own company whom he had detailed as guards for the wounded.

The men told him they had been taken captive as soon as the Virginia Regiment had marched off from Fort Necessity. Were they French prisoners? They were prisoners of the French Indians. Where were they being taken? To Canada. What would be done to them there? They understood they would be offered for sale to the French habitants. If there were no takers, they would finish their lives working as slaves of the Indian tribe that owned them.

Stobo strode to the fort and demanded to see the commandant. He told him the shocking thing he had seen and heard. Contrecoeur was neither shocked nor surprised, and when Stobo asked him to free the men, he refused. Stobo pleaded. He pressed his argument. He cited the terms of the capitulation, which these imprisonments clearly violated. He asked the French commander to make the men French prisoners of war.

Contrecoeur admitted frankly that he did not dare claim the men. They belonged, he said, to the Indians who had captured them, and it

11 Contrecoeur's conversation with Stobo and Van Braam has been adapted from Ensign Ward's discussion with Contrecoeur on surrendering the Forks of the Ohio; from a letter Contrecoeur wrote to Ensign Pierre Drouillon (Contrecoeur Papers, 271); and from instructions sent to Contrecoeur by Governor Duquesne in August and September.
12 He so testified at his trial in Montreal.
13 Toner, 170.
was not within his power to take property from the Indians . . . . 14
Stobo returned with his bad news to the eight English prisoners.

Within a few hours, one of the French Indians came boldly to
Captain Stobo in the fort. In broken English and in sign language he
conveyed the information that he was willing to sell him as many of
the prisoners as he wished. Stobo, concealing his anger, asked the
price. It was 40 pistoles each — a frightful sum, $160, more than
he could pay, even for one man. 15 He called again on the French
commander and again demanded and pleaded that the men be freed, or
that they be made French prisoners of war. He may have offered
to sign his "billet" for the ransom of Graves and Morris, but if he did,
the offer was not accepted, for they, with five of the six others,
were taken off when the French Indians left for Canada on July 25. 16
There is no known record of their fate.

Then and there Captain Stobo decided that the French had
broken the terms of the capitulation, and that he was relieved of his
obligations as a hostage. 17

It was when he was in this angry state of mind that one of the
Indians drew him aside for a moment of private conversation. He was
friendly; he was a Mohawk; and Stobo had seen him at Washington's
conference with the Indians at Gist's plantation. In good English he
identified himself, probably while going through the motions of selling
Stobo some article of Indian-made clothing. He was Moses the Song,
brother-in-law of Monecatootha and the trusted agent of Colonel
Washington. Stobo asked: Would he carry a letter to the English
commander at Wills Creek? He would. The colonel there, Stobo said,
would reward him with many fine presents if he delivered the
letter safely . . . .

Stobo somehow obtained paper, pen and ink — possibly by buying
them boldly from Monsieur Garreau, the storekeeper. He got sealing
wax and a straight-edge. In his room he sat down and began to draw
a careful map of Fort Duquesne.

The French must have concluded that the preoccupied and tireless
English captain felt the need of more and more exercise to keep
up his health and spirits, for his restless pacing increased in the

14 The sources for this conversation are Stobo's testimony at his trial and his
second letter smuggled out of Fort Duquesne. Both letters are printed in
an appendix to the Memoirs.
15 Memoirs, Appendix B, 91.
16 Memoirs, Appendix B, 88. Winthrop Sargent, The History of an Expedition
against Fort Duquesne in 1755, Philadelphia, 1855, 181.
17 Testimony at his trial.
next few days — down to the Allegheny River and back, down to the Monongahela and back, to the point where the Ohio was formed, back to his room, around the walls of the fort, back to his room, to the cabins, around the buildings inside the fort, back to his room.

Day by day the map developed. It showed the magazines, the gates, the ditch, the drawbridge, and the interior buildings complete with their dimensions and functions. The walls were labeled and identified: "The thickness of the whole wall 10½ feet. The parapet or breastwork. Where the men stand to fire. A. A ditch with a breastwork thrown up. B. The earth not dug away in the lunets. C. The entrance of the powder room; 5 cannon mounted on this bastion, in the whole fort 8 cannon, 4 of which three pounders. The prickt [dotted] line represents posts of wood drove in the ground. 12 feet high and mortised together with loop holes for small arms." By the last week of July, the map was completed — a clearly drawn and meticulously detailed scale map of the strongest French fortification on the Ohio.

Stobo then turned the sheet over and began to write. Without salutation, introduction or explanation, he started out abruptly, almost in mid-sentence, like a man who writes under pressure, and perhaps like a man who knows his letter is not unexpected. He took up first the all-important matter of relationships with the Ohio Indians — the rumors they heard, what the French were doing to win them over, how they looked on the English three weeks after the defeat at Fort Necessity . . . .

After a long analysis Stobo addressed himself to the main business of describing the French stronghold.

"On the other side, you have a draught of the Fort, such as time and opportunity would admit of at this time. Its garrison consists of 200 men and workmen, and all the rest [of the troops] went in several detachments to the number of 1000. Two days hence Mercier [Mercier], a fine soldier, goes too; so that only Contracure with a few young officers and cadets remain here. A Lieutenant went off some days ago, with 200 men for provisions. He is daily expected. When he arrives, the garrison will be 400 men."

Captain Stobo then wrote a sentence that was to haunt him for the next five years. It concerned La Force, "the bold and enterprising man" whom Washington had captured in the Jumonville skirmish, now being held a prisoner in Alexandria, for whose safe return Robert Stobo was a hostage.
"La Force is greatly wanted here, no scouting now, he certainly must have been an extraordinary man amongst them — hes so much regreted and wished for."

As if anticipating the thought of the reader, he set down some words that still burn with spirit 210 years after they were written.

"When we engaged to serve the country it was expected we were to do it with our lives. Let them not be disappointed. Consider the good of the expedition without the least regard to us. For my part, I would die ten thousand deaths, to have the pleasure of posessing this Fort but one day. They are so vain of their success at the Medows, its worse than Death to hear them."

With the fort weakly held, Stobo felt it could be taken, and he had a plan to propose for taking it.

"One hundred trusty Indians might surprise this Fort. They have access all day, and might lodge themselves so that they might secure the guard with their tomahawks, shut the sally gate, and the Forts ours. None but the guard and Contracure stays in the Fort. At night the guard never exceeds 50, all the rest are in the cabins round the fort."

He then put down a warning of caution that was to cost him dearly.

"For Gods sake communicate this [to] but few, and them you can trust. Intelligence comes here unaccountably. If they should know I have wrote, I would at least lose the little liberty I have. I should be glad to heare from you. But take no notice of this in yours."

Stobo was now at the end of his sheet and of his 800-word letter. He added self-consciously, "Excuse errors, bad diction, etc. . . . ."

His signature was strong and clear. Stobo knew that he placed his life in danger by writing such a document, and he must have known the risks involved in giving it to an Indian. Why he signed the letter, under such circumstances, is not known. He may have been careless, or defiant, or determined to receive credit back in Virginia for what he wrote. Perhaps he felt that the letter, if it was intercepted, would be traced to him whether he signed it or not.

He folded the letter in four, sealed it, and then on a blank place on the outside wrote a postscript: "Pray be kind to this Indian."

In some unknown surreptitious manner he gave the letter to Moses, who stuffed it in his breech clout, walked through the French lines, and started east toward the English outposts.

The next day Stobo wrote a second letter, smuggled out by an
Indian named Delaware George.

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Moses and Delaware George delivered the letters safely. Governor Dinwiddie was in no position to mount the attack that Stobo suggested, but he was able to keep La Force, the French Indian expert, from being returned. La Force and the twenty other French prisoners were already being taken over the mountains toward Fort Duquesne when Stobo's letter arrived. The Governor read the letter and immediately sent an express rider to bring them back. The result of this was that Stobo and Van Braam were transferred to Quebec. If the English wanted their hostages returned, they would have to negotiate for them now through French representatives at Albany.

In Quebec Stobo lived a fine life. He had money, credit and freedom of movement. He was a favorite of the French ladies. He improved the hour by engaging in a bit of Indian trading with the French Commissioner of Indian Affairs as his partner — there is a note for 1500 livres that Stobo signed in dealing with this man.

And then, in July 1755, Stobo met with disaster.

When the French defeated General Braddock a few miles from here, they took a tremendous amount of booty, including the General's military chest with all his papers. Among these papers was "a map of Fort Duquesne with its exact proportions." This was Stobo's map and

18 Both Moses and Delaware George delivered their letters to George Croghan at Aughwick, though they were addressed to the commanding officer at Wills Creek. On the insistence of the Indians, who wanted to be paid for their services, Croghan opened the letters before forwarding them; he made several copies, sending one set to Dinwiddie and another to Pennsylvania Governor James Hamilton. For this indiscretion he was criticized and "investigated." Dinwiddie, who made such charges easily, accused Croghan of having sent copies to the French. See Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, State of Pennsylvania, 1851-52, VI, 140, 161. Hamilton, I, 37, 49. R. A. Brock, ed. The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, I, 298, 313, 326, 329, II, 227.

19 Brock, I, 298.

20 Charles W. Dahlinger, in The Marquis Duquesne (Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1932, 90), says, "He learned French and even embraced the Catholic faith in order to gratify himself still further with the French." I have carefully examined the source he gives for this statement, J. B. A. Ferland's Cours d'histoire du Canada, Quebec, 1865, II, 510, and can find no mention of this subject.

21 This is recorded in the inventory of the Stobo-Van Braam cell following their escape. See "L'Evasion de Stobo et de Van Braam de la Prison de Quebec en mai 1757," Bulletin des Recherches Historiques, May-June, 1908, Pierre-George Roy, ed. Dr. Marcel Trudel, professor of History of Canada at Laval University, estimates the 1500 livres to be worth about $1500 today.
letter, signed boldly with his name, passed on to General Braddock, and now in the hands of the French.  

Vaudreuil, the new French governor, had already thrown Stobo and Van Braam into a Quebec jail as result of earlier, lesser evidence. Now, with the Stobo letter in his hands, he wrote to Versailles for authority to try the two men for treason. The trial was authorized and began in Montreal in October, 1756. In the intervening fourteen months, the French had used the Stobo affair in a White Paper to make some international propaganda, and Stobo was now a somewhat celebrated figure in the capital cities of two continents.  

Throughout his trial, Stobo conducted himself with dignity, courage and good sense. His behavior, in fact, might well serve as an example in our own day for Americans who are on trial in foreign lands. Alone, inexperienced in law, on trial for his life, he had to conduct his own defense as best he could in a foreign court whose language he did not speak well. The French pounded hard on his plea for secrecy as proof that he knew he was violating his parole. For this reason, he denied for days that he recognized the letter, refused to handle it, and refused to sign the day's testimony, as was customary in French military law. He kept his answers on certain points as noncommittal as possible.  

In the third week of the trial, after constant hammering, Stobo appeared before the full military tribunal. At this point, he gave in and made a half-confession. Here is an extract from the last day of the trial. All this material has lain buried in the Canadian archive publications for many years, and none of it has ever been given in English. None of the hundreds of historians who have written on the  

22 Pennsylvania Archives, Series II, VI, 277.
23 It has always been assumed that Stobo was imprisoned as the result of the discovery of his map and letter in Braddock's wagon train, though nagging doubts arose as to how the letter could have reached Montreal by July 24, the date of which Vaudreuil wrote to his Minister of Marine, "I have had [the two English hostages] confined." Now the newly discovered interrogation of Stobo by General Edward Whitmore (see below) reveals that Stobo was imprisoned some weeks before Braddock's defeat because, in Stobo's words, "A paragraph of a News Paper from London dated January 1755 mentioned a letter I had wrote from Fort Duquesne to the Commander at Wills Creek giving information of the state of the place appearing." On a trip to London in May, 1964, I was able to find the newspaper article Stobo referred to.
action at Fort Necessity — not even Douglas Freeman — has thought to refer to this court record, though it throws new light on the events that took place at the Great Meadows on July 4, 1754.

Let me say here that this dialogue is word-for-word as it was recorded at the trial. However, the long indirect, third-person sentences as recorded have been put back into first-person question-and-answer dialogue as originally spoken.

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The Council of War, specially chosen for this trial, convened at 9:00 o'clock in the morning on Monday, November 8, 1756, in the Council Room of Governor Vaudreuil's mansion. The Governor, in full uniform, presided over the six other officers who, with him, made up the Council. One of these judges was Captain Contrecoeur.

Stobo, seated at the bar, for the first time raised his hand and swore before God to tell the truth. The questioning began.

"What is your name, age, rank, and place of residence?"
"I am Robert Stobo, gentleman, 26 or 27 years of age. I am senior captain of the regiment of Virginia. I lived at Petersburg."
"In what capacity did you come into this colony?"
"I came into this colony as a hostage."
"Do you know what duties a hostage is obliged to fulfill?"
Stobo drew a deep breath.
"I don't know anything about them. I come from a country where there has never been a war, and when I was given as a hostage it was my first campaign, and therefore I had little knowledge of military writs and still less of the duties of a hostage.

"I would never have committed that act of which I am accused, however, if I had not believed the capitulation broken by the French. Under the condition of the capitulation made July 3, 1754, we English were to retire to the other side of the Allegheny Mountains with all the honors of war, on agreement not to establish ourselves on that side of the mountains until after a year's time. This ought to have given us French protection from any insult at all. We were to retire, moreover, with all our belongings excepting the artillery, and since we did not have any horses, we were to leave our belongings under a guard without running any risk of being molested. These are the terms under which we English capitulated, as I recall them.

"The French asked for hostages to answer for some prisoners taken in the affair of M. de Jumonville, and I was delivered as one of these hostages. I was taken the same day of the capitulation, at 8:00
o'clock in the evening, to the French camp. M. Villiers, having left to take possession of the English fort, put me under the guard of a French officer. M. Villiers had scarcely taken possession of the fort [next morning] when I saw several Indians come into the French camp loaded with goods pillaged from the English. Among these were several things that belonged to me.

"When I saw this, I asked permission of the French officer to go to Fort Necessity, and I begged him at the same time to get back for me my belongings already in Indian hands. This officer told me that he could not give me permission to return to the fort without the commandant's knowledge. He told me that he could not take away anything the Indians had, nor could he stop them from taking more.

"Towards 9:00 A.M., I got permission to return to the fort. On arriving, I saw the fort destroyed, the cannon taken away, our trunks spread around everywhere, broken and pillaged. I found the Indians so insolent and outrageous that I hardly had time to take leave of Colonel Washington, who complained very much of this bad treatment and lack of good faith. While I was a hostage under the protection of you French, I was robbed of all my belongings, worth more than 300 guineas, leaving me only the clothes on my back and three or four shirts . . . .

"A few days after my arrival at Fort Duquesne, I saw in the hands of the Indians several English prisoners who had been in the capitulation. I several times begged M. Contrecoeur to take them from the Indians. I was able to get no satisfaction, since the Indians wanted to keep their prisoners.

"One or two days later, the Indians offered to sell me some of these prisoners.

"I also saw in the hands of the French some of my own belongings. Since I needed them, I begged the storekeeper to buy these for me. In the remains of the pillage were the papers of Colonel Washington; I am very certain it was you French who found them. I thought this pillage was not legal and that you should have returned these papers.

"I had never known the Indians before I crossed the mountains, and I thought it was in the power of 500 or 600 brave Frenchmen to prevent 80 or 90 Indians from doing what they pleased, being such a little group. I could only think that you closed your eyes to this outrage made by the Indians, not only with a view to gratify them, but also to attach them more closely to yourselves.
"All these things joined together made me conclude that the capitulation was broken and that therefore I was completely freed of the obligations of a hostage. Moreover, you never asked me for my word of honor after these infractions of the capitulation, and so I believed myself entirely free to do what I pleased for the interest of my country and to give all the information I could contribute to this end. Therefore I wrote the letter in question and I drew the map that is joined to it."

The French prosecutor thrust the letter before Stobo and demanded, "Do you recognize this as the letter you wrote and signed, and the map you made?"

"I recognize this letter as the one I wrote and signed, as well as the map with the notes and the alphabetical letters. I sent them to the commandant at Wills Creek, and I swear by the living God I would not have done it if I had not thought myself to have the right to make the same infraction I am certain was already made in the capitulation."

"Did you not feel, while thus giving information by letters to your superiors in Virginia about everything that was going on inside and outside of Fort Duquesne, instructing the forces in the structure of the fort, begging them to come and attack in the fall, that you were acting against your duty and quality as a hostage?"

"For the reasons I have given you, I counted the capitulation broken, and I did not feel that I was doing anything against my duty and quality as a hostage."

"You wish us to believe that you felt free of your engagement as a hostage, and yet you begged those who received your letter for the love of God to communicate your instructions to very few persons and only to those who could be trusted, since if the French were informed of it, the least that could happen to you would be to lose the little bit of freedom you had. This proves that you did not consider yourself discharged from your obligations as a hostage."

"I feared the consequences of a people who had been presented to me as barbarians, and who had the Indians always quite ready to execute their evil plans. Those who are abused and those who abuse always think differently."

"Did Jacob Van Braam know of your secret when you wrote and sent the letter?"

"He knew nothing of what I was doing."

"Do you wish to propose a challenge to any of your judges?"
"I have no challenge to propose to any of the gentlemen, my judges."

"Do you have anything else to say in your justification?"

"Yes. I wish to protest against the questioning to which I was subjected in prison, because I did not have enough freedom of mind to answer as was best for me."

The proceedings were read aloud. Said Stobo, "The answers are true, I persist in them, and I will sign." He signed the document and was put in the hands of the detachment to be returned to his prison. . . .

Having reviewed all the evidence given and testimony taken, the Council of War handed down its verdict without delay. Van Braam was acquitted. Stobo was held guilty as charged, "for which he is condemned to have his head cut off on a scaffold to be erected for this purpose in the Place of Arms in this city." The verdict in both cases was unanimous.

Van Braam was not freed. He was returned to the Royal Prison with Stobo and thence was once more conveyed with him down the St. Lawrence to the prison in Quebec. There they were confined in separate chambers and under a guard who was under strict orders to keep them from communicating with each other. 26

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Through the influence of French friends, Stobo was quartered together again with Van Braam and soon was allowed an extraordinary amount of freedom for a man under sentence of death. Their jailer, a Charles Montigny, forty-eight, was friendly and bribable, and kept them supplied with good food, wine and entertainment. Their food was brought to them three times a day by French servant girls, Jeanne, aged twenty, and Marie, nineteen. Neither could write her name, but we can hope they were pretty and kind.

Stobo resolved to escape, and Van Braam, though he had been acquitted, loyally agreed to accompany him. On the morning of May 2, 1757, both men were missing. Here is what happened next, as adapted from the record in the police files in Montreal.

* * *

The alarm was sounded. A body of angry officials descended on the jail and its jailer, sent by Intendant Bigot, led by Francois Daine, 26 Testimony of their jailer following their first escape, recorded in "L'Evasion."
a Quebec judge. In very short order, Montigny was being grilled by Daine, Daine's registrar, and an attorney of the King.

"At five o'clock this morning," the unhappy M. Montigny testified, "I entered the room of the two prisoners. I saw Stobo and Van Braam lying in their beds, and so I walked very quietly so as not to awaken them.

"After I lighted the fire in the prisoners' room, I went downstairs. Then two Acadians came to me, sent by Mr. Montesson, to ask for work from the said Stobo and Van Braam.

"I went up to the room again to ask them if they had anything for the poor fellows to do. I called to the English officers, but there was no answer. I called again, and they did not answer at all. I touched Mr. Stobo, and I was very much surprised to find, instead of a man, a beaver great-coat in the bed, with a night cap and shirt, which was made to look like the head of a man.

"I ran to the other bed and there I found a valise, likewise a bonnet and a cotton shirt.

"So I notified the Intendant about what had happened. Also Monsieur the Commandant."

* * * *

The police inventory of the contents of the room was long. It contained, among other things, a chess set, a hat with a plume, four pounds of smoking tobacco, a pound of sugar, an instrument for making bullets, lead for making bullets, a target, and a box of tools. In the box were three files, one iron crowbar, two chisels, and a set of tools for making keys. One would forgive M. Daine if he had exploded, in French, "What a hell of a way to run a jail."

Stobo and Van Braam were recaptured within a few days. Stobo escaped a second time, alone, two months later but was again captured.27

For reasons that are too complicated to go into, Louis XV refused to sign Stobo's death warrant, and so he was given a certain amount of freedom again. He spent the winter of 1758-59 plotting still another escape with several other prisoners. One of these was a most attractive young officer in Robert Rogers' Rangers, a Lieutenant Simon Stevens, captured in June, 1758, near Ticonderoga. Stevens kept a journal of what happened and published it the following year — one of the rarest

books in America. Only four copies are known to be in existence.28

On Tuesday night, May 1, 1759, Stobo and Stevens escaped down the St. Lawrence River in a canoe with three other men named Lakin, Denbo and Clark, and with Clark's wife and three children — nine persons in all. Their goal was to go down the treacherous river, across the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and out into the ocean to Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, about 1,000 miles away. This is by far the most exciting part of Stobo's adventures, but I have time for only a short extract from the Stobo biography. The fugitives have been cast ashore on a desolate part of the coast, and a French sloop and a schooner have anchored near them to ride out the tide. The men have decided to capture both vessels. It is night.

*   *   *

Rowing against the tide, and with two men constantly occupied in bailing the leaky craft, they needed almost three hours to cover the three miles to the schooner.

As they approached, Lt. Stevens went to the bow with a grappling hook. Clark stayed at the helm with the tiller. Denbo and Lakin rowed. Stobo stood in the middle of the boat, a splendid figure armed with a gun in his hands, a cutlass and a pistol in his belt. According to plan, he was to board the vessel first.

There was a light in the binnacle but no watch on deck. Stevens hurled his grappling hook over the side of the schooner, pulled it taut and quickly made it fast. In an instant Stevens was onto the schooner's deck. Discovering all hands were below, he ran toward the companion doors. He heard one of the crew coming out of steerage, whirled, levelled his musket, and took the man prisoner.

Clark, second on deck, immediately took the candle from the compass and ran for the captain's cabin.

Stobo, in the meantime, had scrambled up the side of the vessel the moment contact was made, but he had become hopelessly entangled in the shrouds and had dropped his cutlass and his pistol clattering to the deck. He managed to free himself and leap on deck, and, in the confusion, promptly killed the man to whom Stevens had given quarter. At this point, the astonished captain emerged from below decks, looked once at his dead crewman, and surrendered.

28 The work has never been reprinted. The four known copies are owned by the Brown Library at Providence, Harvard University Library, Massachusetts Historical Society, and the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Mass. The Library of Congress does not have a copy.
When Lt. Stevens described this action the following year, he wrote gravely, “I hope the reader will excuse my being so particular in this affair, as Capt. Stobo has reported that he was the first that boarded the schooner, and the only instrument in taking her.”

The other four crewmen were ordered on deck, disarmed, and locked up in the hold.

Stobo ordered an immediate attack on the sloop. To the captured captain he said, “Monsieur, if you should so much as mutter, you will pay for it with your life.”

Clark set the sails and put two men at the windlass to bring the anchor apeak. Under weigh, they steered straight for the sloop, drew alongside, and called to the captain to surrender and come on board. When he refused, they opened up with small arms, firing about 20 shots and hitting no one. His honor satisfied, the captain called for quarter and came on board to surrender himself and his crew. The two masters were paroled and given the freedom of the deck; the crew was locked below with the others.

Lt. Stevens took Clark, Denbo and the master and boarded the sloop. They found six small arms, a swivel gun, and five days’ provision for five men. They carried these back to the schooner and then set the sloop on fire.

* * *

The fugitives arrived safely in Louisbourg with a number of prisoners and a schooner which they sold for prize money.

Stobo resumed his military career. He returned as a volunteer from Louisbourg to join General Wolfe’s army in the siege of Quebec, and served on the General’s staff until September 7th. He led an attack on a town up-river from Quebec. There is some pretty good circumstantial evidence that he showed Wolfe the path up the hillside to the Plains of Abraham by which the English army took the town was Point-aux-Trembles.

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29 The story of the flight down the St. Lawrence is told, with minor variations, in Stobo’s Memoirs and Stevens’ Journal. Many details of the escape are corroborated by a reporter who interviewed Stobo in Louisbourg (Boston Post Boy and Advertiser, June 25, 1759); by General Edward Whitmore’s interrogation of Stobo and Stevens in Louisbourg, to be published for the first time in the appendix of the forthcoming Houghton Mifflin biography of Stobo; by Stobo’s Memorial to the Earl of Hillsborough, Jan. 24, 1769, published in George M. Kahl’s “Captain Robert Stobo,” Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (April, July, 1941); by references in the letters and journals of Jeffery Amherst, William Amherst, James Wolfe and General Montcalm; and by other references.

30 H. R. Casgrain, ed. Journal de Marquis de Montcalm. Quebec, 1895, 580. The town was Point-aux-Trembles.
city; but we really do not know if this is so. On this point we have to give the Scots verdict: Not proven.

In any case, Stobo left Quebec six days before the attack, carrying important dispatches from Wolfe to General Amherst at Crown Point. He was captured by a French privateer off Halifax, threw his dispatches overboard, and escaped almost certain death by passing himself off as an army butcher. He managed to get to Boston and thence overland to Crown Point. He served with Amherst for several weeks, but when that super-cautious general postponed his campaign to take Montreal until the spring of 1760, Stobo asked and got permission to go home.

He arrived in Williamsburg on Sunday, November 18, 1759, and the reception he got was the eighteenth century equivalent of a reception in the White House and a parade down Broadway. The House of Burgesses gave him all his back pay, plus 1,000 pounds reward for his services and sufferings, plus a promise of preferment, plus an official vote of thanks of the entire Colony. All this was conveyed to Stobo in his lodgings by four of the Colony's finest men, each destined for great deeds: Robert Nicholas, Richard Bland, Richard Henry Lee, and George Washington.

It is interesting to conjecture what fame and fortune Stobo might have won if he had been content to stay in Virginia, but he apparently found life dull and decided to seek a career in the regular British army. He made a flying trip to London early in 1760, where he received some modest acclaim and where William Pitt gave him an interview and a captain's commission in the army, worth 900 pounds — a commission in General Amherst's own regiment, the 15th Foot. He returned immediately to New York, joined Amherst's army at Albany, and went with him on the successful final expedition against Montreal. Stobo was present when the war began at Fort Necessity,

31 J. Clarence Webster, ed. The Journal of Jeffery Amherst, 1931, 178.
33 Massachusetts Governor Thomas Pownall gave him two letters to General Amherst and lent him money to continue his travels. Public Records Office, London, Amherst Papers, XXV, 599, 603.
34 Maryland Gazette, December 6, 1759, article datelined Williamsburg, November 23.
35 Journal of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1752-1765 (Richmond, 1908), 150, 152.
36 Memoirs, 65. The Memoirs ends with Stobo's return to America in May-June, 1760, to receive his commission.
37 Webster, 207. Stobo was sworn in by General Amherst in Albany on June 5, 1760. The Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress has a photostat of the commission.
and he was present six years later when it ended at Montreal, and he must have felt pride, elation and deep satisfaction at marching at the head of his own company to take possession of the city where he had been imprisoned, tried and condemned to death.

Stobo's regiment was garrisoned in Quebec and Montreal for some months and then took part in the successful attacks on Martinique and Cuba. At the Battle of Havana the Captain was badly wounded. In the words of his sisters some years later, he "received very dangerous wounds, being buried under the ruins of a part of the parapet wall of Morro Castle, knocked down by a cannon ball from the town before it surrendered, which wounds were worse than mortal as they were on his head and he never afterward got the better of their baneful effects." 18

Stobo recovered enough to return to active duty in peacetime. He served in garrison duty in Canada for five years, bought 69,000 acres of land along Lake Champlain from a Frenchman and broke his heart trying unsuccessfully to make good his title.19 He sailed with his regiment for England in July, 1768,40 and was stationed at regular army posts in the south.41 He met and became friendly with a fellow-Scot of some fame, the novelist Tobias Smollett. Smollett introduced him with a glowing letter to his friend David Hume, the philosopher. Hume wrote back, "I did not see your friend, Captain Stobo, till the day before I left Cirencester, and only for a little time; but he seemed to be a man of good sense, and has surely had the most extraordinary adventures in the world. He has promised to call on me when he comes to London, and I shall always see him with pleasure." 42

By the year 1770, life had begun to close in on Robert Stobo. He had made a bad investment in buying that land, and he was caught up in the toils of government bureaucracy trying to make good his title. He had not been promoted for ten years; he was still a captain; and the prejudice against Scots was such that there seemed little hope that he would be promoted.43 This was an age when preferment

38 This is revealed in the petition of Robert Stobo's two sisters, submitted after his death to the Earl of Dartmouth, March, 1774, to be published in the forthcoming biography of Stobo.
40 Quebec Gazette, July 7, July 21, 1768.
42 John Hill Burton. Life and Correspondence of David Hume, 1846, II, 418, 419.
43 See Boswell's London Journal, 16-19, for an account of a demonstration in a London theater against Scots.
came through patronage, and all his patrons — Dinwiddie, Wolfe, Pitt, Amherst, Smollett, Hume — were dead, or out of office, or had left England. He was still suffering from his old head wound. He began to drink and his behavior became erratic.

For a hundred years or more, historians have wondered what was the end of Captain Stobo. The British War Office was discreet and even today will tell you only that Stobo died in service, at Chatham, on Tuesday, June 19, 1770, aged forty-three. To Agnes Starrett goes the credit for searching out more information. In the Westminster Journal for June 23, 1770, she found this news item: "We hear from Chatham that on Tuesday afternoon about 3 o'clock, the following melancholy accident happened in the barracks there. Captain S— of the 15th Regiment (now lying in barracks) shot himself. It seems he had been disordered in his mind for some [word omitted] before, and had for several days past drank extremely hard. The Coroners Inquest sat on the body on Wednesday and brought in the verdict: Lunacy." 44

I know of no better way to end this talk than the way the article ends in American Heritage.

"Robert Stobo's most admirable characteristics were tenacity, durability under pressure, and the ability to land on both feet, fighting. Somewhere in the ten years following 1760, these qualities failed him.

"But in the seven crucial and formative years during which the American Colonies freed themselves of French power and dependence on British arms, and so laid the groundwork for the American Revolution, Captain Stobo of the Virginians earned an honored if minor place in our early history. He still deserves from us today, in the words of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 'thanks for his steady and inviolable attachment to the interest of this country, and for his singular bravery and courage exerted on all occasions.'"

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44 The same article was carried in Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle, Friday, June 22, 1770. On September 22, 1770, an official of the business firm Phyn and Ellice wrote to Sir William Johnson, "Captain Stobo has shot himself dead." (Johnson Papers, VII, 913.)