

1974

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Recommended Citation

Rea, Robert R. (1974) "Lieutenant Colonel James Robertson's Mission to the Floridas, 1763," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 53 : No. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol53/iss1/4>

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES ROBERTSON'S MISSION TO THE FLORIDAS, 1763

by ROBERT R. REA*

THE BRITISH ACQUISITION of Florida and the Gulf coast from Spain and France in 1763 represented the rounding out of both continental and Caribbean boundaries, the fulfillment of Pitt's triumphant vision of imperial expansion. But neither the Great Commoner nor the common Englishman had a very clear notion of those territories which were transformed into the provinces of East and West Florida. A misleading propaganda campaign might educate London coffeshop habitués to the beauties and prospective riches of the new colonies, but the British army in North America needed more realistic information in order to establish that internal security upon which future prosperity must depend.¹ Orders from Whitehall assigned the occupation of St. Augustine, Pensacola, and Mobile to troops departing from Havana. At New York the commander-in-chief, Sir Jeffrey Amherst, cast about for an officer upon whom he could depend for coordination of the territorial transfer, the gathering of pertinent and accurate details, and perhaps ultimate command in the southern borderlands. His choice fell upon James Robertson, lieutenant colonel of the 15th Regiment of Foot and deputy quartermaster general of the army in North America.

A native of Fifeshire and a man in his early forties, James Robertson was a seasoned campaigner. Having enlisted as a private in a marine regiment, he was commissioned and served in the disastrous Cartagena expedition of 1741. A captain at the end of the War of Jenkins's Ear, he transferred to the Foot and worked his way to a majority in the 60th Regiment (Royal Americans) by the outset of the French and Indian War.² Ad-

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1. Charles L. Mowat, "The First Campaign of Publicity for Florida," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXX (June 1943-March 1944), 359-76.
2. Robert L. Jones, *A History of the 15th (East Yorkshire) Regiment* (Beverly, Yorkshire, 1958), 178.

vancement was the reward of administrative competence and personal qualities which won the attention of the Duke of Cumberland and the favor of Lord Loudoun, whose repeated recommendations secured Robertson his quartermaster's deputyship in 1757. By the end of that year he was part of Loudoun's official "family" in New York, a man "upon whose good sense Loudoun came more and more to rely."³ Although Loudoun's caution accomplished too little against the French in Canada to please the politicians, he won the respect of his officers, and they in turn prospered under his successors in North America. Robertson was able to shift to the 55th Regiment in 1758, saw action at Louisbourg, and was transferred to the 15th Regiment as lieutenant colonel early in 1760, serving as deputy quartermaster general under Amherst.⁴ With Canada reduced and the peace ratified in 1763, Amherst and his staff settled into headquarters at New York. Sir Jeffrey, anticipating being relieved of the command and returning home, entrusted the Florida mission to a well-trying and proven subordinate.

The "Instructions" which Robertson received from Amherst on August 24, 1763, directed him to St. Augustine, Pensacola, and Mobile, where his "chief business" would be to inform himself "of the particular state and condition of the Fortifications and other publick Works . . . the number of Troops necessary for Garrisoning it; what Guns, Artillery Stores & ca. are there at present, & what more will be wanted: & likewise the small arms."⁵ From thence he was to travel up the Mississippi River, establishing British garrisons in the ceded French posts as far as Vincennes, although that place would be supplied from Fort Pitt. Headquarters for the western posts were to be settled at Fort Chartres on the Mississippi. In the later stages of his endeavor, Robertson was advised to seek the cooperation of the

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3. Stanley McCrory Pargellis, *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765* (New York, 1936), 234, 318, 333; *Lord Loudon in North America* (New Haven, 1933), 167.
 4. Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, 416; Jones, *History of the 15th*, 178; John Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, 1965), 71.
 5. "Instructions," Sir Jeffrey Amherst to James Robertson, August 24, 1763, Sir Jeffrey Amherst Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Hereinafter cited as AP.

French governor and commanding officer at New Orleans. Having provided the expedition with shipping, Amherst judged that "the craft I now send with you . . . will answer for proceeding up the River Mississippi; and you will take such additional ones on the spot, or hire such Boats, as may be necessary." For the duration of his mission Robertson was given command over all forces in Florida and Louisiana, the authority to draft men from one regiment to another, and he was provided with two months' provisions for 200 men, £1,000 for extraordinary expenses, and cash subsistence for five months for the original occupation forces that had been dispatched from Havana. He might also establish Mr. Mallet, a surgeon, and his two mates, and three army commissaries, wherever he thought most suitable. Upon completion of the mission Robertson was instructed to make "a full Report," although Amherst envisioned the possibility that he might decide to remain at one of the the southern posts.⁶

As the troops assigned to occupy the Spanish and French coastal forts left Havana with minimal equipment, Robertson found himself responsible for a small supply fleet which Amherst assembled at New York. The lieutenant colonel sailed aboard the brig *Hannah*, master John Thurston, in company with a Captain Muller, the young surveyor-engineer Lieutenant Philip Pittman, and Surgeon Mallet. The ship's cargo included the money Robertson was carrying to the occupying regiments, plus 1,200 picks, shovels, axes, and spades for construction purposes.⁷ Aboard the ship *Venus* were a dozen officers of the 9th, 22nd, 34th, and 35th Regiments, a number of soldiers, and a supply of bedding. The sloops *Curaçao*, *Tryal*, and *Peggy* carried other men and equipment, although the *Peggy* got away before the rest of the convoy in order to deposit a detachment of the 42nd Regiment at Jamaica. The brig *Kitty* sailed after Robertson's departure with ninety-one tons of supplies and a few late drafts for Florida.⁸

6. *Ibid.* [command authorization].

7. On Pittman, see my introduction to his, *The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi* (London, 1770; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1973).

8. "List of Transports under the Direction of Lt. Colonel Robertson," Amherst to Robertson, September 24, 1763, AP.

Amherst was particularly interested in the condition of the posts in the upper Mississippi area. He probably provided Robertson with a description of the Illinois country titled "Some Account of the Country & Post on the Mississippi . . . as given by a Frenchman," and hearing from Sir William Johnson that French traders might supply Pontiac's Indian rising with arms and ammunition by way of the Mississippi, he sent after Robertson instructions that when the British occupied the Illinois all traders should be kept out of the region.⁹

The expedition sailed from New York about the end of August, and in spite of becoming separated at sea the ships came together off the bar at St. Augustine on September 8. The bar was not a sight to lift a landsman's spirits. "The waves on it running mountain high, and the wind blowing directly on shore," Robertson wrote, "we stood out and were glad to clear the land." The next day was no better. The convoy stood in toward the bar, but its signals failed to elicit a pilot. Robertson ordered the *Hannah* brought under the stern of an English transport anchored with her yards and topmasts struck, and boarding her he learned that pilots were only to be had by making personal application ashore. His first attempt to send in a plea for assistance almost proved catastrophic; the small vessel bearing his messenger foundered in attempting to cross the bar. Happily, the officer was saved and delivered Robertson's request for a pilot to the St. Augustine garrison. As none was immediately available, Robertson remained at anchor off the bar from September 9 to the 10th. "The night was terrible," he remarked, "and it was with difficulty we rode out the gale being anchor'd in the open ocean." A fourteen-inch cable was reduced by stretching to a mere eleven inches! On the morning of September 10, the wind abated, and a Spanish launch brought out a pilot who got all the ships except the *Venus*, which was too deep of draft to cross the bar, into St. Augustine harbor. The *Venus* discharged her stores by small boat and was sent back to Charleston.¹⁰

9. Amherst to Robertson, September 25, 1763, AP.

10. Unless otherwise indicated, the narrative of Robertson's travels is based upon his long letter to Amherst, November 15, 1763, AP.

Robertson found much to concern him in St. Augustine. The place had been occupied by Captain John Hedges and four companies of the 1st Regiment on July 20, and Hedges had been relieved by Major Francis Ogilvie and the 9th Regiment ten days later.¹¹ The 9th was in a weakened condition, and even with the replacements Robertson brought with him, it could muster no more than six full companies. The lieutenant colonel felt such a complement unnecessary, however, and decided to send one company to Apalachy. Military stores in St. Augustine were badly spoiled. Much was only fit to be destroyed, although Ogilvie might recoup something from the sale of part of the goods. Fortunately there was no shortage of money, and Robertson could report that "the soldiers are well look'd after, mess regularly, and sometimes buy fish or beef to accommodate them." "The demand for flour is greater than for any other [item]," Robertson found. He noted, "this place tho' capable of producing everything affords nothing at present but fish, not an herb, not a cabbage, all is overgrown with weeds. Cattle come from Georgia, and beef is sold at 9d. N. York money a pound." Robertson immediately set aside land for a regimental garden and instructed Ogilvie to see to its cultivation. He further sent notices to Georgia and South Carolina assuring merchants that no duties would be levied on supplies brought to St. Augustine. This step, he hoped, would lower prices, for necessities he found to be "as dear here as at the Havannah."

Thanks to the timing of his visit, Robertson gained a happy impression of the climate— "the Cold in Winter is only sufficient to mark the differences of Seasons but does not prevent the growth of all sorts of Vegetables, green Pease may be had at Christmas without the aid of fire or glass [greenhouses]." In a country that would produce "all sorts of grain and fruits . . . with little labor," where "two Crops of Indian Corn has been had off the same field in one year," the Briton could only blame "the indolence of the Spaniards" for the relative barrenness of Florida.¹²

11. Charles L. Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (Berkeley, 1943; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1964), 7.

12. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Colonial Office, "Report of Florida," 5/83:137ff. Library of Congress transcripts. Hereinafter cited as "Report." Other Colonial Office documents cited CO.

If food was in short supply, rum was not, and Robertson issued orders to restrict its excessive flow. "The new regulations," he found, "were not well receiv'd by the soldiers," and six men promptly deserted, four with their arms. Robertson was forced to ask Spanish Governor Melchoir Feliu to order out two parties of twelve dragoons to assist the mounted English sergeant and corporal he sent in pursuit of the fugitives, for "the Spaniards understand tracking better than Indians, or this country either cover'd with sand or grass better affords the means." The deserters' tracks were picked up in less than a mile, and after a gallop of nine leagues they were run to earth. A general court martial sentenced four of the men to death, and two received 1,000 lashes. Robertson thought the four deserved to be shot; and though he considered leaving their fate in Amherst's hands, he feared that the general might pardon them and thereby encourage further desertion. Urged to mercy by the court and Major Ogilvie, who pointed out that three of the condemned had good characters, and moved by the interposition of Governor Feliu, Robertson decided to be "humanely wrong rather than rigidly right." He ordered out four firing squads, prepared four coffins, forced the prisoners to kneel blindfolded in a row, but allowed only one squad to fire. After this morbid example of merciful justice, the 9th Regiment was advised that henceforth all deserters would be shot.¹³

Housing was a major problem for the British troops at St. Augustine, for its Spanish population of over 3,000 had little room to spare, and Spanish authorities claimed that nearly everything save the governor's house was private property protected under the terms of the Treaty of Paris. There were no barracks for British officers. The first to arrive had been placed in private homes with Governor Feliu's permission, but those of the 9th Regiment were asked to pay for the quarters to which they were assigned, and "the Spaniards disliking to have strangers in their familys generally quitted the houses where Officers were quarter'd." Robertson received a memorial from the Spanish commissary demanding payment of \$180 per week for

13. On the seriousness of the problem in the new colonies, see Robert R. Rea, "Military Deserters from British West Florida," *Louisiana History*, IX (Spring 1968), 123-37.

the officers' quarters, and although he was under orders "to show as much kindness & civility to Spanish as to British subjects," his patience was severely strained by the Spaniards' expectations. He insisted that he would "not put the Crown to an expense in their favor which was not allow'd to Brittish Subjects," and refused to pay for quarters.¹⁴

As the Spaniards were preparing to withdraw to Havana, Commissary Juan Cotilla had also been appointed to assist private individuals with the sale of their property. Robertson found that his valuations were "not unfavorable to the proprietors," but Cotilla was disposing of their land cheaply and trusting the Spanish government to make up the difference between evaluation and sale price. Jesse Fish, resident factor for Walton & Co. of New York, was already involved in this business with Cotilla by September 1763. Perceiving that Fish's connections and local familiarity would enable him to achieve "a monopoly prejudicial to the growth of a new Colony," Robertson took steps to forestall the scheme in which Fish and his partner John Gordon were engaged. On his return trip, in January 1764, Robertson encountered Gordon at Charleston. The conniving land agent showed him conveyances for 10,000,000 acres of Florida real estate, proposed to sell them to the Crown at "a very moderate profit," or "procure Settlers to possess them, on advantageous Conditions to himself." Robertson recognized a slick operator when he saw one and firmly rejected Gordon's suggestions— a course in which he was upheld by authorities in both New York and London. Under the circumstances, however, Robertson's efforts to persuade Spanish civilians to remain under British rule were quite fruitless. "Not content with carrying away all the living," he grimaced, "they remove the dead. The Bones of the late governor and of a number of Saints are carr'd to the Havannah."¹⁵

14. "Report."

15. *Ibid.*; Gage to Halifax, March 10, 1764, CO 5/83:83-84. Robert L. Gold, in "Politics and Property During the Transfer of Florida from Spanish to English Rule, 1763-1764," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLII (July 1963), 22-24, 29-32; and *Borderland Empires in Transition: The Triple-Nation Transfer of Florida* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1969), 44-45, 51-52, fails to credit Robertson with the ability to see how the Walton factor could take advantage of the situation to his own profit. Men such as Fish and Gordon did not restrict their activities to the legitimate concerns of the companies for which they worked, nor did they recognize

The Castillo de San Marcos was naturally of special interest to Robertson. The fort was “built of a mixture of Sand and Shells, brought from the Island of Anestasia,” a material easily worked but “too porous to keep out water however thick the wall may be. The Spaniards therefore cover the outside with plaister. It has the advantage over freestone that when struck by a bullet it receives it without flying in pieces.”¹⁶ The deputy quartermaster general set Lieutenant Philip Pittman to try his skill at drawing plans and sections of the Castillo. He further observed to Amherst that, “The lines and morasses with which it is surrounded are its greatest strength, an enemy would find great difficulty to pass these, but when within them, the ground is so favourable for an approach that the fort could resist an enemy with a proper artillery but a few days. The extent of the lines would in case of a seige require more troops than are now in Florida for their defense, but the present garrison will be sufficient to keep them in repair in the time of peace.” The Spaniards had mounted (and now removed) eighty-two guns; but the Englishman thought sixteen enough to cover its flanks, and another “sixteen light pieces, easily to be moved from one part of the lines to another would be more proper for the defense of the place, than a heavy numerous Artillery.”¹⁷

San Marcos was not always a pleasant place. Robertson observed that “the climate is hot, the weather glass this day [Sept. 26] is at 90, and there being no thorough [i.e. circulating] air, the rooms are suffocating, the soldiers quarter’d in them generally chuse to lye on the ramparts.” He proposed to make loop holes in the walls and to establish quarters for two officers within the

any embarrassment in “conflict of interest.” On Fish, see Robert L. Gold, “That Infamous Floridian, Jesse Fish,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LII (July 1973), 39-50. Robertson did not ignore his own interests and later secured a grant of 15,000 acres in East Florida. Louis De Vorsey, Jr., ed., *DeBrahm’s Report of the General Survey in the Southern District of North America* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1971), 256.

16. “Report.”

17. *Ibid.* The Ordnance Board’s proposal of April 9, 1764, for forty-four guns did not have the benefit of Robertson’s “Report” (which reached London April 13), but the Board’s decision was much closer to his recommendation than to that of Governor James Grant who asked for at least eighty pieces, a request obviously based upon Spanish practice. It was precisely to avoid such extravagance that Robertson was sent on this mission— a point *not* noted by Claude Sturgill in “The Decision to Re-arm St. Augustine,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, XLIX (1971), 204-07.

fort, there being none at the time. Robertson also scheduled one of the three chapels and the friars' rooms for officers' quarters as soon as the Dons departed. There was, at least, "a very good airey hospital for sixty men."

In addition to San Marcos, the East Florida establishment included Picolata, seven leagues north on the St. Johns River. It was a tower on which the Spaniards kept four light guns and ten men to cover the river crossing and guard communications with Apalachy. An outpost against the Indians in Spanish hands, it would become a trading post for the English, Robertson believed. Mosa, two miles away, was a turf redoubt with two guns, manned by a sergeant and twelve men.¹⁸ Merely a lookout post in a flat country, Mosa was a refuge for "all the runaway Negroes from our Colonys" who "were protected and had lands assign'd to them" in the vicinity. "They became pretty numerous," Robertson reported, "but were all ship'd off before my arrival at St. Augustine." The lower entrance to St. Augustine harbor, Matanzas, boasted a tower, five guns, and a piquet of ten men. A lookout house on Anastasia Island completed the list of northern posts. On the Gulf coast there was Apalachy. A new stone fort was abuilding, and its ideal location for controlling Indian trade persuaded Robertson that it ought to be supported, and land communication— which the Spaniards lacked— should be secured. He would order a detachment to that "remote frontier," but Lieutenant Colonel Robertson would bypass it on his tour of the Floridas.¹⁹ Although Robertson ordered surveyors Pittman and Moncrief to prepare plans of these positions, only that of Matanzas seems to have been completed before they sailed for West Florida. The engineers were also instructed to compile more general maps of the country, but the Indians prevented any extensive surveying.

The worst thing about St. Augustine was "the badness of the bar & the want of pilots." "The bar of St. Augustine has sometimes at high tides fifteen foot water, at low water there is

18. In the "Report," Mosa is described as containing four guns and ten men, but this looks like a copyist's error.

19. "Report." See also Mark F. Boyd, "From a Remote Frontier," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XIX (January 1941), 179-212; XIX (April 1941), 402-12; XX (July 1941), 82-92; XX (October 1941), 203-09; XX (January 1942), 293-310; XX (April 1942), 382-97; XXI (July 1942), 44-52; XXI (October 1942), 135-46.

sometimes but four. The breakers run terribly high, and the Coast is unsheltered from heavy Southeast Storms to which it is very subject in the fall of the year."²⁰ The real difficulties were exaggerated by the story that the bar was constantly shifting, "a fable invented to raise the price of pilotage," Robertson observed. He put Pittman to work charting the bar and describing the landmarks in an effort to remove some of the seamen's fears, but at the moment, he admitted, the danger was believed to be "so great that no vessel will come here at this season, tho' they have had high prices for what they have brought." As larger vessels could only pass the bar on a rising tide it was frequently necessary, in the face of contrary winds, to tow them out of the harbor. The towage fee was sixty "bitts" for the soldiers who manned the twenty-oared launch and \$3.00 for the pilot. Robertson tried to improve the service and secure competent people by proposing to buy and provide the launch, a house at the lookout, and guaranteed prices, but no one would undertake the job for less than £50. A couple of unemployed New York pilots settling at St. Augustine, sighed Robertson, would be of "infinite use" and could learn their task within a week.²¹ In contrast to St. Augustine, Robertson recommended the development of other harbors such as the mouth of the Musketto River (now Ponce de Leon Inlet), Key West, and Tampa Bay.

Business rather than weather detained Lieutenant Colonel Robertson at St. Augustine until October 6, in spite of his "earnest endeavours to get away sooner." He sailed aboard the *Hannah*, bound for Pensacola by way of the Florida Keys, in company with the *Curaçao*. A fair wind shifted to a southerly gale, however, and course was changed for Providence in the Bahamas, where Robertson arrived October 17 to find the *Tryal* which had transported elements of the 9th Regiment to the islands. Although he hoped to get over the Bimini bank at once and reach Pensacola in eight days, crosswinds detained him until October 22, and he did not reach the capital of West Florida until November 5.

St. Michael de Pensacola was an unimpressive fort. "Its enceint consists of rotten stockades. The Governor's house is of

20. "Report."

21. *Ibid.*

brick, almost all the others are of bark and without Chimneys." The 900 inhabitants, including 140 transported felons from Mexico and about sixty Christianized Indians, were dependent on the Spanish garrison. Poor soil and hostile natives forced the town to draw its food supply from Mobile.²²

Leaving orders for Major Forbes and the 35th Regiment who were daily expected, Robertson sailed on to Mobile, November 6, and arrived on the 9th to find the 34th and 22nd Regiments, commanded by Major Robert Farmar, had taken possession of the town and Fort Condé (renamed Fort Charlotte) on October 20. "There was some other company I was not so well pleased to see," wrote Robertson, "about five thousand Choctaw Indians encamped around the Town, in woods which are within half gun shot of the streets." So ill-disposed were some of the chiefs that they would only give their left hands to the English upon meeting and even refused to drink rum with them!

The Indians had come in about November 1, at the invitation of the governor of Louisiana, to receive their last French presents— gifts which had been delayed four years by British naval interdiction. Acting Governor D'Abbadie and his military aide, M. Aubry, had come to Mobile to distribute this largesse and to deliver "talks" to the Indians. Robertson admitted that their words were entirely cordial and friendly toward Great Britain, but at first he "was persuaded that all this was a piece of French policy to retain the inclinations of the Indians." Subsequently Robertson was persuaded that as the New Orleans garrison was so drastically reduced that it was "hardly sufficient to protect them against their own Negroes;" the French were only concerned "to bring so powerful a neighbor into good humor," and the French gifts "were given rather with a view to divert the Choctaws resentment from themselves than to turn it against us." Though wishing he might disperse both French and Indians, Robertson saw that any such action would only produce "ill consequences." French Mobile, a town of some 350 inhabitants, sprawled about the fort. Its one-story houses were elevated on pillars to escape the frequent flooding brought on by violent gales. The brick fort was "fast crumbling to ruin."

22. *Ibid.*

Happily, Governor D'Abbadie soon persuaded Robertson of his pacific intentions, and as he graciously harangued the Indians "hand in hand" with Major Farmar, Robertson concluded that it was principally by his efforts that the Indians would be brought to a friendly attitude. At least Robertson prevailed on D'Abbadie to distribute but half the intended quantity of gunpowder and to do so in such manner that it could not easily be conveyed to the warring tribes to the north. A further difficulty arose as the redskins, though "glutted with French victuals," demanded entertainment by the British as well. "I told them," said Robertson, "in Europe it was ill manners to feed another man's guest, that if I had invited them, I should be angry if M. Dabadie fed them." By distributing a few of his own clothes and many promises of his King's future generosity, he escaped from a real embarrassment.

Robertson was fascinated by the French system of distinguishing Great and Small Medal Chiefs among the Choctaw. The former received medals "of Silver four inches diameter. . . . One side has the French King's head, and the other figures signifying the friendship between them and the French." Not only did the system create "a dependence throughout the whole Nation, which all terminates in the French Governor," it also set a Gallic style that grated on the sensitivities of the British officer. "French manners are in vogue in the Nation, every Indian affects them, and is esteem'd in some measure as he succeeds. A Chief bows like a dancing Master, kisses both your cheeks and makes you a French compliment." Concerned to secure and retain the friendship of the tribes, Robertson gathered information concerning their villages, took steps to encourage trade among them, and suggested the employment of Montault de Monberaut, a French officer who was "perfectly acquainted with them, who has the greatest interest of any man living among them. He could lead these into all our views [and] could prevent the emigration of the [French] Mobillians by his influence & example."²³

Robertson's opinion of all Frenchmen was much higher than that of Major Farmar. That doughty Englishman felt that the

23. *Ibid.* See also Milo B. Howard, Jr., and Robert R. Rea, trans., *The Memoire Justificatif of the Chevalier Montault de Monberaut: Indian Diplomacy in British West Florida, 1763-1765* (University, Alabama, 1965), 23, 65-66.

French had attempted to delay his landing, had treated him shabbily on shore, were conniving with the Indians, were attempting to leave him defenseless by removing the guns of Fort Condé, and were doing their best to block British occupation of the interior. D'Abbadie criticized his dispatch of troops to the fort on the Tombecbé River and successfully discouraged the sending of British forces to Fort Toulouse. When he arrived, Robertson found Farmar and D'Abbadie were "on no good footing," for the Briton claimed the cannon of Fort Condé and the French held that the treaty had ceded only the land and buildings. Robertson got around the technical argument by pleading that he was under immediate orders to send troops up the Mississippi into Indian territory and that it behooved both nations to support their success in maintaining European domination. He offered to return the French guns to New Orleans should his view of British rights prove wrong, and he appealed to D'Abbadie to "rebind the knots of amity" by giving up the cannon to the British. D'Abbadie agreed to leave the guns of Forts Vincennes and Chartres in place, as well as those of the forts dependent on Mobile, and he mollified Robertson by cooperating in other matters relative to the occupation of the Mississippi River posts.²⁴

Robertson saw little value in the outlying forts on the Tombecbé and Alabama rivers. They were but "slight stockades." The approach by water was completely commanded by the high banks of "a serpentine shallow river," and the French had always "depended more on the Indian friendship than on the strength of the places for the safety of their garrisons." He considered "a small garrison out of the reach of succor . . . as so many hostages in their hands," and had he arrived in Mobile

24. Robertson to Amherst, November 15, 1763, AP. Robertson to D'Abbadie, December 5, 1763; D'Abbadie to Robertson, December 7, 1763, in Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence E. Carter, eds., *The Critical Period, 1763-1765* (Springfield, Illinois, 1915), 58-60, 205-06. Farmar to D'Abbadie, November 9, 1763; Farmar to Secretary at War, January 24, 1764, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1763-1766, English Dominion* (Nashville, 1911), I, 9-12, 36. When the matter reached London, the ministry upheld Farmar's and Robertson's positions. Halifax to Gage, May 12, 1764, CO 5/83:173.

earlier, he would have forbidden Farmar's occupation of the Tombecké Fort Choiseul.²⁵

Both D'Abbadie and Aubrey were free with advice regarding the proposed ascent of the Mississippi, and Robertson probably correctly, if uniquely among the British officers involved, judged the French to be sincere in their support of the project. D'Abbadie even provided Major Arthur Loftus, who would command the expedition, with authority to seek the assistance of the Illinois militia at the junction of the Ohio "in case the Indians should offer an opposition there, which Mons. D'Abbadie says is the only place where they could do it to any effect."²⁶

More pertinent was D'Abbadie's advice that Robertson's sloops and brigs were totally unsuitable for ascending the Mississippi farther than New Orleans and that "the 450 leagues which remains must be performed in row boats. None of these can be got here [Mobile], and it is doubtful if many can be had at N. Orleans." However, with Governor D'Abbadie's assistance, Robertson proposed to try. He planned to sail to New Orleans with Captain William Bayne aboard H.M.S. *Stag*, accompanied by Aubry, in order "to provide everything for the transportation of the troops" to the Illinois.²⁷

Robertson had to change his plans, for the *Stag* was lying in Ship Island roads until the end of the year, refurbishing and revictualing.²⁸ He and Bayne did get to New Orleans neverthe-

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25. "Report." See also Robert R. Rea, "The Trouble at Tombeckby," *Alabama Review*, XXI (January 1968), 21-39.
26. Robertson to Amherst, November 15, 1763, AP. In fact, Loftus was turned back at the Roche D'Avion, a mere sixty-five leagues north of New Orleans. See Robert R. Rea, "Assault on the Mississippi—The Loftus Expedition, 1764," *Alabama Review*, XXVI (July 1973), 173-93.
27. Robertson to Amherst, November 15, 1763, AP.
28. Great Britain, Public Record Office, Admiralty Papers, Log of H.M.S. *Stag*, 5/498. I have been unable to pinpoint Robertson's movements between November 15, 1763, and January 21, 1764. He expected to leave Mobile on November 15; he was in Mobile December 5-7. Loftus said that Robertson preceded him to New Orleans by two months, which would place him there about November 23. But, as Loftus seems to have had his departure from New Orleans in mind when he wrote, he may have meant about December 27 (Loftus to Halifax, December 24, 1764, CO 5/83:539). As Robertson wrote that he expected Loftus to leave Mobile about January 1, it is clear that he had left West Florida before that date ("Report"). A late December departure for New Orleans seems most reasonable and would help explain Farmar's comment upon Robertson's "being in such haste to return to make his report to Sir Jeffrey Amherst" (Farmar to Secretary at War, January 24, 1764, in Rowland, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, I, 8).

less. As he reported that a gale encountered in the course of the trip forced his party to land on the coast among the Pascagoula and Biloxi Indians, it seems likely that Robertson made the trip by small craft along the inner passage and through Lake Pontchartrain. He was relieved to find that the Mississippi coastal Indians were "tame, harmless"—"the French bad me not be afraid, they were *bons sauvages pas des Choctaw*."²⁹

In New Orleans Robertson undertook to make advance arrangements for the imminent arrival and river voyage of the 22nd Regiment. He contracted with the merchant Maxent for suitable boats to be ready by mid-January, and he secured assurances from Aubry and Nicholas Foucault that the contract would be fulfilled. He also sought the services of M. de la Gauterais, an experienced frontiersman, as a guide for the British expedition, but in this he was unsuccessful.³⁰

James Robertson's orders had envisioned his continuing his tour from the Gulf coast on up the Mississippi to the posts in the Illinois country. No doubt his experiences at St. Augustine, Mobile, and New Orleans persuaded him that the report he was required to make to headquarters in New York would be the more impressive if made in person—and he the happier for delivering it there. Having ascertained all he could regarding the forts and the route north, he left the adventure to Major Arthur Loftus and the veterans of the 22nd Regiment and sailed eastward without delay. His next stop seems to have been Charleston, South Carolina, where he landed January 21, 1764, to learn that Amherst's place had been filled by General Thomas Gage since November 17, 1763. Robertson sketched for the new commander-in-chief the dispositions he had made in the Floridas, innocently assumed that Loftus was on his way to Fort Chartres (he had not yet, in fact, reached New Orleans), and advised that he would leave for New York in a few days, hoping to arrive in three weeks. Gage was under the impression that he would travel by land, but it seems more likely that Robertson continued by sea. In any case, he was back at headquarters in

29. "Report."

30. Loftus to Halifax, December 24, 1764, CO 5/83:539; John Stuart to Secretary of State, April 10, 1765, CO 5/66:31.

sufficient time to draft a lengthy report for Gage by March 8, 1764.³¹

Robertson's "Report" included a "luxurency of matter" and was supported by many plans and papers, yet he felt that it might "more properly be consider'd as the title or contents of a bulky collection." Many details he reserved for his conversations with Gage, but it was a remarkably thorough document, highly enlightening to the ministry at home, and it arrived in time to be transmitted to James Grant and George Johnstone, the newly appointed governors of East and West Florida. Secretary of State the Earl of Halifax declared that "the many interesting informations therein contained will be of great use."³²

In New York Robertson's experience in the new territories was certainly of service to Gage and to the harassed commanders in the Floridas to whom the sympathy of the deputy quartermaster general was most vital. When Gage decided to appoint a brigadier for the southern department, Robertson was widely rumored to be his choice. No doubt James Robertson breathed a sigh of relief when the honor fell to Henry Bouquet. He may even have had a hand in making that fatal selection.³³

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31. Robertson to Gage, January 21, 1764, Lieutenant General Thomas Gage Papers, William L. Clements Library. Gage to Halifax, February 11, 1764; Robertson to Gage, March 8, 1764, CO 5/83:69, 133.
 32. Halifax to Gage, May 12, 1764, CO 5/83:173; Gage to Halifax, April 13, 1764, CO 5/83:173, 297. Robertson's "Report" was in Johnstone's hands by May 4, 1764. Rowland, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, I, 117-18.
 33. Lt. Col. David Wedderburn to Alexander Wedderburn, April 14, 1765, Alexander Wedderburn Papers, William L. Clements Library. Robertson received promotion to colonel in 1772; major general in America, 1776; commanded a brigade in the Battle of Long Island, 1776; became civil governor of New York from 1779 to 1781; received promotion to lieutenant general, 1781; and died in London, 1788.