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PREM 19/294

Confidential Filing

Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

MEMOIRS

JANUARY 1980

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
<del>22.1.80</del>							
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<del>11.7.80</del>							
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PREM 19/294



MOUNTBATTEN

PA

- CF file

MS

22/4/81

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Memorandum

Ref. A03522

MR. SANDERS

Lord Mountbatten and Suez

There has been another article by Bernard Levin in today's Times, with further extracts from Lord Mountbatten's filmed recollection of his part in the Suez affair.

2. Mr. Levin now says that he is not concerned with whether the account was true or not ("I was in no position to evaluate his words") but with Lord Mountbatten's concern that the truth should not be suppressed and with ensuring that Lord Mountbatten's version was not altogether suppressed.

3. The comments made in Mr. Levin's first article (including Lord Hailsham's, but others have commented as well) suggest that it cannot be assumed that Lord Mountbatten's version is "the truth".

4. There is no question of his version being "altogether suppressed". The Secretary of the Cabinet made clear (to Lord Brabourne and to Mr. Kennedy) his view that Lord Mountbatten's account of his role in the Suez affair should in due course be on public record. The question is one of timing. Lord Mountbatten thought that it should be as soon as possible after his own death (he seems to have been more concerned with potential embarrassment to himself than with anyone else's interests). The Broadlands Archives Trustees and the Secretary of the Cabinet took the view that it should not be published while some of those concerned were still active in public life. It is a matter of judgment.

5. The Sunday Telegraph of 9th November 1980 carried a report that "top secret Cabinet papers [on Suez] were extracted from the official record and destroyed either by or under the supervision of Lord Normanbrook". The Daily Telegraph for 10th November reported that Lord Normanbrook had said to Sir Robert Lusty shortly before he died that he "had destroyed all my papers, every note, relating to Suez". A rather similar story was told by Sir Hugh Greene in a letter to the Times on 27th June 1978, when he reported



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Lord Normanbrook as saying that "damned good care has been taken to ensure that the whole truth never does emerge". Sir Hugh Greene assumed that Lord Normanbrook was referring to the destruction of important papers.

6. The memoranda and minutes of the Cabinet and of the Cabinet Committee particularly concerned with the Suez matter are complete throughout the period. If Lord Normanbrook destroyed any papers, they were not Cabinet records.

7. Apart from that, if the Prime Minister is questioned about the destruction of Suez papers, I suggest that she should say that she cannot comment, and we shall have to wait until the official papers become available for public inspection under the rules in the Public Record Acts 1958 and 1967.

REA

(Robert Armstrong)

11th November, 1980



Ref. A03455

PA - CF&K

MS  
22/4/81

MR. SANDERS

Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

The Times today includes an article by Bernard Levin, arguing that the decision of the Broadlands Archives Trustees, after considering my advice, not to authorise the showing of Lord Mountbatten's filmed record of his role in the Suez affair, was "a suppression of the truth" which would have been contrary to the wishes of Lord Mountbatten, and including various quotations from the script of the programme.

2. There is not much that I can add, by way of notes for answers to possible Questions, to the note which I sent to you on 27th October, and my letters to Mr. Ludovic Kennedy, of which I think you have had copies. I am not sure, however, whether you have had a copy of my last letter of 27th October, which has not been published.

3. I attach a few further notes for supplementaries, in the form of background notes rather than answers to Questions.

4. Nothing in Mr. Levin's article has changed my view about publication of the programme; if anything, it has strengthened it. But that of course is the point on which there is a fundamental difference of view between me and the Trustees on the one hand and Mr. Kennedy and now Mr. Levin on the other.

5. The disclosure of the script to the Times was without the knowledge or agreement of the Broadlands Archives Trustees, and Lord Brabourne has already been in touch with me to express his regret.

6. Mr. Levin talks about "the truth being suppressed". There are good reasons for thinking that Lord Mountbatten's account of the matter was in many respects some way from the truth - though I do not suggest that his own view of the matter at the time was other than as he describes it. But the accuracy of the programme is beside the point. My concern was not whether it was right or wrong, but with the breaches of confidence which it contained.



7. The Prime Minister should know, however, that Lord Hailsham has consulted me as to the propriety of his writing to the Times to correct the record, insofar as it relates to his own part in the affair. His letter will say that the conversation reported by Lord Mountbatten and quoted in columns 4 and 5 of the article in the Times never happened, and that Lord Mountbatten's recollection was confused and at fault. I have said to Lord Hailsham that in my view it would not be a breach of propriety for him to write to the Times to correct inaccuracies in Lord Mountbatten's account as it applies to him.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

5th November, 1980

Broadlands Archives  
Trustees

Mountbatten

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Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

Further notes for supplementaries

It is clear that someone in the BBC "leaked" to Mr. Levin the original script of the programme on Lord Mountbatten and the Suez affair and an indication of the passages whose omission the Secretary of the Cabinet had suggested on the ground that they were particularly glaring breaches of confidence. Mr. Levin claims not to be in breach of the law of copyright. That is a matter between the Broadlands Archives Trustees, the BBC and Mr. Levin. The Government is not involved. If there was a breach of the undertaking given by the Broadlands Archives Trustees to the former Secretary of the Cabinet, it occurred when the BBC were given access to material in the Broadlands archives without the prior consent of the Secretary of the Cabinet.

2. It is not accurate for Mr. Levin to say that "the truth was being suppressed". The Secretary of the Cabinet made clear to the Broadlands Archives Trustees and in his letters to Mr. Ludovic Kennedy his view that Lord Mountbatten's account of his role in the Suez affair ought in due course to be on public record. The question was one of timing.

3. On the conventions laid down in the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial Memoirs, accounts of confidential relationships should be subject to restriction for fifteen years or so long as those concerned are still "in the Service" whichever is longer. In this case, Lord Hailsham is clearly still "in the Service"; and Mr. Macmillan is still active in public life. Outside the period which is conventionally subject to restriction, whether or not and when to disclose confidential relationships is a matter of taste and judgment. In this instance the Broadlands Archives Trustees and the Secretary of the Cabinet took the view that the time had not yet come when this programme should be shown; the BBC and Mr. Kennedy took a different view. Someone in the BBC has now chosen to pass the script to Mr. Levin without the agreement or knowledge of the Trustees as a means of circumventing the Trustees' decision not to authorise the showing of the programme at this time.

15 yrs.  
no restriction  
the service



4. The Secretary of the Cabinet kept the Prime Minister informed of the advice he was giving to the Broadlands Archives Trustees about the Mountbatten programmes in general, and the Suez programme in particular. He did not ask for her approval, but she made it clear that she was content with his general approach.

5. Nothing in Mr. Levin's article has changed the Prime Minister's view that the Broadlands Archives Trustees were entirely justified in their decision, and the Secretary of the Cabinet was justified in his view, that the time had not yet come when the breaches of professional confidence - and indeed of personal friendship - in this programme should be made public.



NOTES FOR SUPPLEMENTARIES

Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

Q. Why did the Secretary of the Cabinet become involved?

A. Lord Mountbatten was allowed to retain for the Broadlands Archives certain material which he acquired in the course of his official responsibilities under conditions which gave the Secretary of the Cabinet a right of veto on access to and use of the material. In accordance with his agreement the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Trust sent the scripts of six programmes to the Secretary of the Cabinet late last year. The Secretary of the Cabinet considered the scripts in relation to the responsibilities laid upon him by the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd. 6386), which was accepted by the Government and the Opposition at the time and lays down the principles and conventions involved in the publication of memoirs by both Ministers and those in the public service.

Q. On what grounds did the Secretary of the Cabinet give instructions that the programme on Suez was not to be broadcast?

A. The Secretary of the Cabinet gave no such instructions. When the scripts were first submitted to him, at the end of 1979, he asked that the programme on the Suez affair should not be transmitted for the time being, because of its potential consequences in the tense situation then prevailing in the Arab world. When he was approached again last July, he said that it was no longer necessary to ask for the postponement of the showing of the programme on those grounds, but he repeated the advice which he had given earlier that in his view the showing of the programme in question would represent a clear breach of confidential relationships, some of them with people still active in public life. He made it clear, however, that in accordance with the conventions recommended by the Privy Counsellors' Committee the responsibility for deciding whether the programme should go ahead or should be withheld for the time being rested with the Trustees in the light of the advice which had been given to them.

Q. Is this a case of Government interference with the BBC?

A. No. The Secretary of the Cabinet gave his advice to the Broadlands Archives Trustees.



## BACKGROUND NOTE

At the end of 1979, Lord Mountbatten's son-in-law, Lord Brabourne, sent the Secretary of the Cabinet the scripts of a series of proposed BBC programmes containing Lord Mountbatten's recollections which had been made some years ago. These scripts were sent to Sir Robert Armstrong as a result of undertakings given to Sir Burke Trend by the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement in 1969. Sir Robert considered these scripts in accordance with the principles recommended by the Radcliffe Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs. He wrote to Lord Brabourne on 8th February this year requesting certain minor deletions from the programmes on grounds of national security or prejudice to international relations. He also suggested that the Trustees should consider changing or omitting certain sections of the scripts of these programmes which in his view constituted grave breaches of confidential relationships. Apart from these specific suggestions, he expressed his view that the programme on the Suez episode constituted a serious breach of the professional confidence governing the relationships which Lord Mountbatten enjoyed as First Sea Lord with Ministers and with his other colleagues. Sir Robert also asked for the showing of the Suez programme to be deferred for the time being in view of the tense situation which then prevailed in the Arab world.

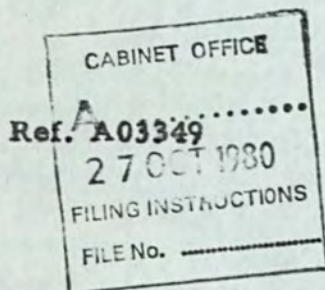
2. Lord Brabourne confirmed in reply on 15th February that the contract between the BBC and the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement provided that any amendments or omissions required by the Government would be accepted, and that all the suggestions which Sir Robert Armstrong had made to modify the scripts on questions of confidentiality would be accepted. On the question of postponing the Suez programme, he said that he would contact Sir Robert Armstrong later in the year to see whether transmission then might be possible.

3. When Lord Brabourne again wrote to him on 1st July about the postponement of the Suez programme, Sir Robert Armstrong replied that, although he did not think it necessary to ask for a further postponement of the programme on the grounds of the delicacy of the situation in the Middle East, he continued to believe that the breach of confidences contained in the programme was such that its



showing would be a serious breach of professional trust and personal friendship. In this respect, he drew Lord Brabourne's attention again to the considerations set out in the Radcliffe Report as they applied to Lord Mountbatten. He asked Lord Brabourne that he and his fellow Trustees should consider very seriously indeed whether they should allow the showing of the programme to go ahead. Lord Brabourne subsequently told Sir Robert Armstrong that he and the other Trustees had decided that the programme on Suez should not now be included in the series and that the material was to be deposited at the Imperial War Museum in the joint names of the BBC and the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement, against the possibility that the time might come when the programme could be shown.

4. The presenter of the programme, Mr. Ludovic Kennedy, wrote to Sir Robert Armstrong on 25th September asking for an explanation of why he had advised Lord Brabourne that the Suez programme should not be shown. Sir Robert Armstrong replied on 3rd October giving details of the considerations he had had in mind in giving advice to Lord Brabourne. Mr. Kennedy wrote again to Sir Robert on 14th October, asking a number of further questions. Sir Robert Armstrong's reply to Mr. Kennedy reached him only after Mr. Kennedy's article in The Listener had gone to print and he was not able to take account of it in the article. Mr. Kennedy proposes, however, to write to the Editor of The Listener, for publication in its new issue, quoting Sir Robert's second letter.



VMS  
JW 27/10  
File  
27th October, 1980

Thank you for your letter of 23rd October.

I can understand why anyone reading only my exchange of letters with Lord Brabourne might make the comment in the second paragraph of your letter. May I, however, make four points on that paragraph:

- (a) I made quite clear to Lord Brabourne at the beginning of the year - though not in the letter you have seen - my view that the programme on Suez as a whole constituted a serious breach of confidential relationships and that the trustees should consider from this point of view whether the programme ought to be shown.
- (b) The request in my letter of 8th February 1980 to Lord Brabourne that the programme should not be shown for the time being because of the situation in the Arab world was of a different order from my advice on the matter of confidential relationships. The request was one to which, under the principles set out in the Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors, the trustees were under a duty to accede; the advice was only something that they were expected to pay careful attention to in making their decision.
- (c) I did not put the advice in my letter to Lord Brabourne of 8th February because the questions whether and when the programme was to be shown were hypothetical while my request for postponement remained in effect. When I wrote on 8th February I was not to know when the question of showing the programme would arise or what view it would by then be appropriate for me to express on the question of confidential relationships.
- (d) I have taken no decision on whether the programme should be transmitted, because it is not for me to take a decision. I have expressed views, if you like given advice; the trustees have taken a decision.

/On

Ludovic Kennedy, Esq.

On your third paragraph I cannot accept that my reliance on the Privy Counsellors' Report has been selective. I might equally complain that your quotations from it are selective! I have tried, as honestly as I can, to apply in this instance the whole tenor of its recommendations as they apply to my responsibilities.

I must not allow myself to be drawn by the questions at the end of your third paragraph. Perhaps you intended them to be only rhetorical, but they are certainly hypothetical. The only answer I could give would be quintessentially Asquithian!

I think that the last paragraph but one of your letter sums the matter up admirably; and I thank you for the courtesy with which we have both (I hope) conducted this correspondence.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

CONFIDENTIAL

cc Mr Ingham



Memoirs

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S MEMOIRS

The Prime Minister was very pleased to learn from your minute AO2702 of 23 July 1980 of the successful outcome of your negotiations with Lord Brabourne about the Suez programme based on Lord Mountbatten's memoirs.

She agrees with the line which you suggest in paragraph 9 of your minute we should take if the Press get on to the affair.

AWL

24 July 1980

CONFIDENTIAL



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Prime Minister

A very satisfactory outcome. Sir Robert Armstrong must have been most persuasive.

Content with the proposed time for use with the Press if needed (paragraph 9)?

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23ii

Ref. A02702

PRIME MINISTER


Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

I sent you a minute on 11th July about the scripts of the six television programmes based on Lord Mountbatten's memoirs, and in particular about the breach of confidential relationships represented by the Suez programme and the effect which it would have on Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon. In the light of your comments (Mr. Whitmore's minute of 14th July), I asked Lord Brabourne to come to see me. He called on me on Friday, 18th July.

2. I thanked Lord Brabourne for the changes which had been made in the scripts following my letter to him of 8th February. I told him that I did not wish to require the further deferment of the Suez programme on the grounds of the damage which it could cause to international relations. I felt bound, however, to make clear my view that the broadcast of the Suez programme would be a serious breach of professional trust and personal friendship, particularly while some of those concerned were still active in public life. I said that I thought that it was arguable that in making the material available to the BBC for the purpose of preparing the programme the trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement were already in breach of their agreement with my predecessor. But, I went on, I did not wish to rely on that; I was basing my position and my advice upon the responsibilities laid upon me in the report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd 6386), the relevant paragraphs of which I read to him, and upon the obligations deriving from that report which senior public servants, such as Lord Mountbatten as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1956, were expected to observe. At the end of our meeting I gave Lord Brabourne a letter (copy attached) in which I summarised my views making it clear that I could only give advice, and that the responsibility for a decision rested with him and his trustees.

3. In further discussion, I said that, although it might be possible to take the references to Mr. Macmillan, Lord Selkirk and Lord Hailsham out of the programme, it would be impossible to do the same with the extensive references

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to Lord Avon. These were certain to cause great distress to Lady Avon, not so much because they added anything new as because they came from Lord Mountbatten. Furthermore, it was unlikely that another First Lord of the Admiralty, who had not been a member of the Royal Family, would have been permitted to make public comments of this kind. If the programme went out, there would be a risk of criticism that there was one law for Lord Mountbatten and another for other public servants.

4. I told Lord Brabourne, that in addition to the breach of trust and confidence which would be involved in the broadcast of the programme on Suez, there was also a risk that the late Lord Mountbatten's account could be criticised on the grounds that some of his statements were inaccurate (particularly in regard to Lord Selkirk). I realised that the Suez affair was a matter of great public interest, and that Lord Mountbatten's account of his own contribution to it should in due course be on public records. But it was questionable whether this was the right time to show it on television.

5. Lord Brabourne said that he understood the grounds on which I had been obliged to take this line and that he was himself in a difficult position. If he had a free hand in the matter he would wish the programme to be put off. But Lord Mountbatten had himself proposed, shortly before his death, that this series of programmes should be prepared, and an agreement between the trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement and the BBC had been prepared in June last year. Immediately after the murder of Lord Mountbatten he could perhaps have gone back on this agreement and taken the necessary action to suspend the work of the BBC. But he had not done this, because he had himself been in hospital with serious injuries sustained in the same explosion that killed Lord Mountbatten. There was a clause in the agreement with the BBC that the programmes would be broadcast unless it was decided by the Cabinet Office that this would be undesirable.

6. After a time, however, he told me that this agreement had not actually been signed. He saw the force of the objections which I had raised; the problem for him was now to find a way out of the difficulty. He wondered, for instance, whether it might be appropriate to consider whether the broadcast of the



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programmes in general and particularly the one on Suez should take place later this decade, perhaps for instance in 1984-85 when Philip Ziegler's authorised biography of Lord Mountbatten was due to be published. I said that it was difficult to see what would be possible so far ahead but that much would depend on whether Mr. Macmillan, Lord Hailsham and Lord Selkirk were still active in public life. Another appropriate occasion for showing the programme might be when the official papers on the Suez affair were released under the thirty year rule.

7. Lord Brabourne accepted that the decision was now for him, taking account of the advice which I had given him. He would speak to his fellow trustees and then to the BBC to see if they would be willing to accept a postponement of the Suez programme. But he was doubtful about the likelihood of success and wondered whether it might be more effective if the BBC were to receive an approach from me. I told him that I would in principle be willing to talk to Sir Ian Trethowan about this, if that would help matters.

8. Lord Brabourne has now let me know that, following a discussion with his fellow trustees (who were less bothered than he was about the unsigned agreement and urged him to take a robust line with the BBC), he has seen Sir Ian Trethowan who has agreed that the Suez programme should not be included in the series. Lord Brabourne has not given Sir Ian Trethowan any undertaking on when the programme could be shown. The material in question is to be deposited with the Imperial War Museum in the joint names of the BBC and the trustees, so as to ensure that it cannot be made available to any other television company. I attach a copy of Lord Brabourne's letter, and of my reply.

9. This is a satisfactory outcome. I think, however, that we have to assume that the postponement of the Suez programme will leak to the Press and that comments will be made about the role of the Cabinet Office in the affair. Lord Brabourne has said that, as far as he is concerned, he will try to keep such comments to a minimum. If questions are asked about the Cabinet Office's role, they should be answered to the effect that in accordance with the responsibilities laid upon me by the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial Memoirs

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I gave Lord Brabourne my views on the breach of confidential relationships, some of them with people still active in public life, which the showing of the programme would represent, but that I made it clear that the responsibility for deciding whether the programme should go ahead or be withdrawn for the time being rested with Lord Brabourne and his fellow trustees, and that the decision is theirs and (as we understand) taken in the light of careful consideration of the advice given to them.

10. I am sending a copy of the minute and of my exchange of letters with Lord Brabourne to Mr. Ingham in view of possible Press interest.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

23rd July, 1980

Temporarily Retained *dy* 18/11/2014  
**THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS  
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT.**

Retained material now released -  
see following page (Aug 2025)



CONFIDENTIAL

I gave Lord Brabourne my views on the breach of confidential relationships, some of them with people still active in public life, which the showing of the programme would represent, but that I made it clear that the responsibility for deciding whether the programme should go ahead or be withdrawn for the time being rested with Lord Brabourne and his fellow trustees, and that the decision is theirs and (as we understand) taken in the light of careful consideration of the advice given to them.

10. I am sending a copy of the minute and of my exchange of letters with Lord Brabourne to Mr. Ingham in view of possible Press interest. I have informed Sir Philip Moore separately and have sent him a copy of my exchange of letters with Lord Brabourne.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

23rd July, 1980



CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

23rd July, 1980

Ref. A02695

Thank you for your letter of 21st July, and for coming in last week to discuss the question of the six programmes to be entitled Lord Mountbatten Remembers.

I am glad to know that you and your fellow trustees have decided, and have been able to agree with the BBC, that the programme covering the Suez affair should not now be included in this series of programmes. I note what you have said to the BBC as to the possibility of showing the programme at some time in the future; and I also note that the material is to be deposited at the Imperial War Museum in the joint names of the BBC and the trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement.

I accept of course that there may be comments in the Press. If any questions are put to me, or to those who deal on my behalf with questions from the Press, they will be answered to the effect that I was consulted about the programmes; that in considering what advice I should give I acted in accordance with the responsibilities laid upon me by the Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd. 6386, paragraphs 74 to 87); that I felt bound to advise you that in my view the showing of the programme on the Suez affair would represent a serious breach of confidential relationships, some of them with people still active in public life, but that the responsibility for deciding whether the programme should go ahead or not rested with you and your fellow trustees; and that the decision was accordingly the trustees', taken no doubt in the light of careful consideration of my advice.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The Lord Brabourne

41 MONTEPELIER WALK

LONDON SW7 1JH

01-589 8829

Your Ref: A02645

21st July 1980

*Dear Sir Robert,*

Thank you for your letter dated July 18th.

I was very glad to have a chance to discuss the question of the six programmes to be entitled Lord Mountbatten Remembers which it is proposed should be broadcast by the B.B.C.

I can now confirm that Programme 2 which covers the Suez affair will not now be included in this series of programmes. I have explained to the B.B.C. that the Trustees are not able to give any guarantee that it will be possible to show the Suez programme in the future and I am arranging for the material to be deposited at the Imperial War Museum in the joint names of the B.B.C. and the Trustees.

I am most grateful to you for your help and advice over this matter and I am glad that it has been resolved. However, I am sure you will understand when I say that I am concerned about the comments that are likely to be made in the press and I can only assure you that I will do my utmost to keep these to a minimum.

*Yours sincerely*

*Baroness*

Sir Robert Armstrong, KCB., CVO.

22

CABINET OFFICE
A .....
Ref. A02665
18 JUL 1980
INSTRUCTIONS

18th July, 1980

Thank you for your letter of 1st July about the six extracts from the autobiographical film record made by Lord Mountbatten.

I am grateful to you for making the changes which I requested on grounds of confidentiality. I note that you have also made (or had made even before I wrote to you in January) a number of the changes I suggested on grounds of taste. I am sorry that you have not been able to make all of them; there are still some references which are in my view questionable and liable to cause needless distress. But it is for you to decide.

When I wrote to you in January, I had to ask you to defer the showing of the programme about the Suez affair, on the ground that if shown then it could have significantly damaged international relations at a time of considerable tension in the Middle East. The situation in the Middle East remains uncertain and tense, and some possibility of damage remains; but I do not think it necessary to require a further deferment of the showing on that account.

I must, however, draw your attention to the fact that at the time of the events described in the Suez programme Lord Mountbatten, as First Sea Lord, was in a position where the preservation of confidences entrusted to him by Ministers and by his colleagues was expected of him as a matter of professional duty. Many of those concerned were also, on his own admission, his friends, and would have relied not only on his sense of professional duty but also on the obligations of friendship to protect their confidences to him. If some of the conversations described in this programme are correctly reported, it is clear that his interlocutors believed that they were talking to him in total trust and confidence, with no thought or expectation that he might subsequently make public use of the conversations in this way.

In my view, and in the view of those whom I have had occasion to consult in deciding what advice I should give to you, the showing of the programme would represent a serious and regrettable breach of professional trust and personal friendship. Some of those concerned are dead; others are still alive and active in public life. In that connection I remind you of what was said in paragraph 86 of the Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd 6386), which draws attention to the rule that a former Minister should not

/reveal -

The Lord Brabourne

reveal - however long after the event - advice given to him in confidence by those in the public service whose duty it was to advise him, so long as they are still in the public service. I think that a similar obligation must be held to apply to someone who, like Lord Mountbatten, was in a senior position of trust in the public service, in relation to what was said to him by those whom it was his duty to serve or with whom he was working, so long as they are active in public life.

The Suez affair is of course a matter of great public interest, and Lord Mountbatten's account of his own contribution to it ought in due course to be on public record. But I do not believe that that argument is a sufficient reason for going ahead with this programme at this time, when weighed against the arguments for not doing so to which I have sought to draw your attention.

In your letter you say that Lord Mountbatten wished these programmes to be shown as soon as possible after his death. Whatever his reasons for so wishing - as to which I can only speculate - I am afraid that I do not think that his wish absolves you and your trustees from present responsibility. By deciding that the film should not be shown until after his death, he transferred to you and your fellow trustees the duty of deciding whether and when it should be published. I can understand that you would want to have regard to his wishes; but the responsibility for the decision is now yours.

I have to ask - indeed, to advise - you and your fellow trustees to consider very seriously indeed, in the light of what I have said, whether you should allow the showing of this programme to go ahead while some of those named and quoted in it are still active in public life. You will understand from this letter that my judgment is that you should not do so. If questions were asked, I should be bound to say that that was the advice which I had given. But the responsibility for the decision is yours.

When you have had time to consider this letter, I should be grateful if you would let me know what decision you have reached, so that I can inform the Prime Minister.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

CONFIDENTIAL



Memo 21

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S MEMOIRS

The Prime Minister has seen your minute A02597 of 11 July 1980 about Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs and she has commented as follows: "I entirely agree with your advice. As national security is not involved, we cannot veto the publication. If Lord Brabourne decides to go ahead I should be grateful if you would see Lady Avon and Mr. Macmillan. But should we distress them before Lord Brabourne decides?"

If you still think that you should see Lady Avon and Mr. Macmillan before you see Lord Brabourne, as you proposed in your minute, may I suggest that you have a word with the Prime Minister first?

TWH

14 July 1980

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Prime Minister

Agree that Sir Robert Armstrong should,

as he proposes:

a. speak to Mr Macmillan and  
Lady Avon;

b. approach Lord Brabourne on the  
basis of paragraphs 13 + 15 below?

Ref. A02597

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

AH

May I take your mind back to the minute which I sent you on 16th January about the scripts of six television programmes based on Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs, and to Mr. Whitmore's minute and your own manuscript minute of 22nd January.

2. Following that exchange of minutes, I wrote to Lord Brabourne, proposing a number of specific changes in the scripts, saying that it was judged that the showing of the Suez programme at that time could have untoward consequences for international relations in the Middle East and asking for the showing of that programme to be deferred until some more propitious time.

3. In Lord Brabourne's reply (which was copied to Mr. Whitmore) he confirmed that the contract between the BBC and the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement provided that any amendments or omissions required by the Government would be accepted. He said that all the suggestions which I had made for modifying the scripts on questions of confidentiality would be accepted. He implied that all the important points I had made on matters of taste and judgment had already been dealt with. He said that the request for postponement caused a considerable problem for the BBC and said that he would contact me again in June to see if a transmission in September would be possible.

4. It so happened that in May I was in contact with Mr. Philip Ziegler, who has been appointed Lord Mountbatten's official biographer. He had learned from Lord Brabourne that the Cabinet Office had "vetoed any showing" of the programme about Suez. Mr. Ziegler said that he did not wish to lobby against the veto, and that he fully understood the reasons for it; but he would like to know whether it was seen as a permanent veto or a temporary one which would be reviewed. I explained to him that we had not "vetoed any showing" of the programme: we had judged that its showing could have untoward consequences for international relations at that time, that I could not say how long the deferment

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would need to be, because that would depend on events; and that it might well need to be for some months. Mr. Ziegler said that he would not have been surprised if we had asked for the programme to be deferred until after the death of Mr. Macmillan. It was clear that he hoped that the outcome would be that Lord Brabourne and the BBC would decide to go ahead with the other programmes and drop the idea of putting out the Suez programme.

5. Lord Brabourne has now, as expected, written to ask that I should clear all the programmes, including the Suez programme, for transmission in the near future. I attach a copy of Lord Brabourne's letter.

6. The fact that the matter is under discussion has been leaked to the Sunday Times: I enclose a copy of what was published in that paper on 29th June.

7. I wrote to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 19th June, in anticipation of a letter from Lord Brabourne. I said that it seemed to me that the situation in the Arab world was no less critical now than it was in February, and that I was bound to say to Lord Brabourne that I must ask him to continue to defer the transmission of the Suez programme. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office reply, a copy of which I attach, written after consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, says that the Foreign Office do not ask for a further deferment of the Suez programme on international political grounds. It is clear that they do not wish to have any part of the public odium which would no doubt attach to a further deferment.

8. There remain the points which you made on 22nd January about the effects of the publication of the Suez programme on those mentioned in it, and particularly on Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon. You asked me to consider how they might best be warned. I have not pursued that, while the programme was being deferred for international political reasons. If that ban is to be removed, the effect on Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon becomes a matter of immediate consideration and concern.

9. The damaging references to Mr. Macmillan are on pages 17 and 18 of the revised script. I doubt whether there is anything that has not been said before in one place or another. The damaging references to Lord Avon pervade the whole script. Again, they present a picture of him in which there are no new features; what is damaging, and very distasteful, is that it is Lord Mountbatten saying it.

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10. The references to Mr. Macmillan would, if published, cause him some annoyance. Those to Lord Avon would, I think, cause Lady Avon both anger and distress. What is said by Lord Mountbatten is a betrayal of professional trust and personal friendship. What makes it worse is the deliberation with which he arranged for this betrayal to take effect after his death, when he could no longer be asked to justify his behaviour and what he has said in the programme.

11. I have two questions to consider:

- (1) whether to ask or advise Lord Brabourne to defer the showing of the Suez programme until after Mr. Macmillan's death;
- (2) if so, whether to be ready to exercise whatever right of veto I possess (on behalf of the Government) by virtue of the agreement signed between the Lord Trend and the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement.

12. I have considered these questions in the light of the recommendations of the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd 6386), which is my bible for these purposes. The relevant sections are paragraphs 49-57, 74-80, and 82-87. My role is advisory, not that of a censor. Where it is a matter of clearance in respect of national security and the preservation of international relations, there is "a positive duty" on the author to give way to my objections, if they are maintained against representations (and appeal to the Prime Minister if necessary). There is no specific time limit to this. In respect of breaches of confidential relationships, my duty is to offer my views, and advice, whether I am invited to do so or not; the author is under an obligation to pay careful attention to my advice but is not under a duty to give way to it: it is for him to take upon his own shoulders the responsibility of deciding what he is going to say and how he is going to say it. For fifteen years from the date of the events in question he should regard himself as bound by approved rules and procedures governing confidential relationships; thereafter he can, if he so wishes, take his own unrestricted line in dealing with the subject.

13. Applying these recommendations in this instance, I propose to invite Lord Brabourne to come and see me, and to represent to him that this programme, if broadcast, would represent a breach of professional trust and personal friendship, and would cause <sup>annoyance</sup> and distress to Mr. Macmillan, Lady Avon



and others whom Lord Mountbatten has put in an unflattering light in order to highlight the virtue of his own position. I shall say that I do not think that Lord Brabourne can shelter behind Lord Mountbatten's desire that the programme should be transmitted as soon as possible after his death: the responsibility is now his, not his father-in-law's. I shall draw his attention to paragraph 86 of the Radcliffe Report. That draws attention to the rule that an ex-Minister should not reveal the advice given to him in confidence by those in the Service whose duty it is to advise him, so long as they are still in the Service. In this case the boot is on the other foot; but the principle is valid. I shall say that I believe that he is bound to consider very seriously withholding the Suez programme while some of those named in it are still active in public life, probably at least until Mr. Macmillan's death, and perhaps while Lady Avon is alive. I shall say that, if questions are asked, I (or you, if the questions were put to you in Parliament) would be bound to say that that was the advice which I had given.

14. As to whether I should seek to enforce my advice with a veto, it has to be said that it is not clear that the right of veto which the agreement with the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement extends to these scripts, which are not material retained by Lord Mountbatten from his official service, or to the particular aspects of the scripts to which I should be taking exception. Nonetheless I doubt whether my right would be challenged by Lord Brabourne; and if I ruled that the Suez programme should not be published and he accepted my ruling, I think that the BBC would be bound to comply with it, though they would certainly publicise the fact that I had made it. It would be clear that I had made the ruling - as the Sunday Times piece says - in the interests of protecting political reputations rather than for reasons of genuine national security. It would no doubt be pointed out that the events in question occurred over 23 years ago, and thus well outside the period of fifteen years which the Radcliffe Committee thought should be the period during which confidentiality on those grounds should be preserved.

15. I have come to the conclusion that the right course is to act in accordance with the recommendations of the Radcliffe Committee: to give Lord Brabourne my views and advice, on the lines of paragraph 13, but not to seek to exercise a veto.



Though neither the correspondence between Lord Trend and Lord Mountbatten nor the agreement with the Trustees specifies the purposes for which the Secretary of the Cabinet was to be given a veto, it must be assumed that it was primarily for the purpose of safeguarding national security. The Radcliffe Committee clearly considered that the responsibility for decisions in questions of disclosure of confidential relationships should (particularly after fifteen years) rest with the author, not with the Secretary of the Cabinet. For me to seek to exercise a right of veto (if I have it) would not only be to go well beyond the duties laid upon me by the Radcliffe Committee; it would take the responsibility off the shoulders of Lord Brabourne, on whom it should rest.

16. I think that Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon ought to be warned; if you agree, therefore, I propose to get in touch with both of them, to tell them what is proposed to be published, the views and advice which I propose to give, and why I think it difficult for me to prevent publication, if Lord Brabourne is determined to go ahead.

17. As you know, I have already discussed this with Lord Hailsham, who has been content to leave the matter entirely in my hands. Lord Brabourne and the BBC have in fact accepted the deletions which I proposed relating to Lord Hailsham, and what remains is a good deal less damaging than what was originally there.

18. I should be glad to know whether you are content for me to proceed as I now propose. If so, I intend to see Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon before I see Lord Brabourne.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

11th July, 1980

I entirely agree with your advice. As national security is not involved we can't veto the publication. If Lord B.

-5- decides to go ahead I should be grateful if you would see Lady Avon & Mr. Macmillan.

But should we discuss them before Lord B. decides? — not.

41 MONTPELIER WALK  
LONDON SW7 1JH

01-589 8829

Your Ref: A01368

1st July 1980

CABINET OFFICE	
A	3452.....
- 1 JUL 1980	
FILING INSTRUCTIONS	
FILE No.	_____

*Dear Sir Robert*

I am writing again in connection with our correspondence last February about the television series entitled "Lord Mountbatten Remembers". I am sure you will remember in my letter dated February 15th, I promised to let you have copies of the revised scripts and I am now enclosing these with this letter. I am glad to say that nearly all the points which you raised in your letters dated February 8th have been incorporated in the revised scripts.

At that time, you agreed that I should write to you again in June to see if the situation had changed as the BBC are most anxious to go ahead with their transmission. Apart from this, as I mentioned to you previously, my father-in-law was also keen that these programmes should be shown as soon as possible after his death, and it is now certain that this can not happen before August 27th, which is the first anniversary of his death.

Now that nearly all your points have been incorporated in the revised scripts, I do hope that you will be able to clear these programmes for transmission in the near future. It does seem to me that all these events happened a very long time ago and that nearly everybody connected with them have already had their say, apart from my father-in-law. Quite apart from this, I think it can only be held in his favour, and this country's, that he was so strongly against the actions taken at the time of Suez.

I look forward to hearing from you again in the near future.

*Yours sincerely*

*Thasomine*

Sir Robert Armstrong, KCB., CVO.

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## Secrets of Suez

A CABINET Office decision appears imminent over controversial material included in a BBC TV series featuring the frank and sometimes startling reminiscences of the late Lord Mounbatten.

Senior BBC officials expect to be told tomorrow whether the government has cleared the material—about the 1956 Suez invasion—for public consumption. The six-part series should have started in January. It was postponed while discussions took place between the Cabinet Office and Lord Brabourne, Mounbatten's son-in-law and owner of the material.

Just what Mounbatten says in the film, which was shot by a freelance crew in 1971, has been smothered in official discretion. I understand however that he makes two points. (1) That there was collusion between the French and British over the invasion and (2) That he disapproved of it and considered resigning as Defence Staff chief at the time.

Although collusion has been conclusively established since then, it was always denied at the highest government levels, notably by Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden and foreign secretary Selwyn Lloyd. The BBC has steadfastly refused to be involved in what it regards as a personal affair between Brabourne and the Cabinet Office. Even so, senior officials are anxious that the material should not be axed. Having committed themselves to the film once, they would not wish to be party—even by association—to a cover-up, especially in a matter which involves old political reputations rather than genuine national security.

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Sunday Times 29.6.80

(Mercury Notebook)

Extract from Sunday Times 29.6.80



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 July 1980

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO  
CABINET OFFICE

*pl attach X*

CABINET OFFICE
A 3690.....
- 8 JUL 1980
FILE INSTRUCTIONS
FILE No. ....

*Dear Robert,*

1. In your letter of 19 June about the Mountbatten television series you asked whether I agree with you that, because of the continuing critical situation in the Arab world, you should ask for the programme on Suez to be further deferred.
2. Any programme on Suez is liable to cause a flurry and no doubt a programme in which Lord Mountbatten is the central figure will attract greater interest and an above average audience, many of whom will have little interest in international relations but will follow the series for the sake of seeing Lord Mountbatten. The interest the Suez programme arouses is likely to be short-lived, but its 'suppression' would be liable to attract considerable adverse and recurrent comment in the press, of which the piece in last week's Sunday Times is but a forerunner.
3. *Attached below* The situation in the Middle East is never easy, but I do not believe that the transmission of a programme of Lord Mountbatten's reminiscences will affect it seriously or damage British interests. I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary about this and he agrees that we should not ask for a further deferment of this programme on political grounds.

*Yours sincerely,*  
*Michael*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Palliser

SUEZ

Opening titles:  
Montage Photos of  
Mountbatten

MUSIC S.O.F.  
(Preobajensky March)

Egypt 1956

S.O.F.  
Battle Effects

L.M.: Nothing that has ever occurred to me in time of peace caused me so much trouble, so much worry, so much pain and so much grief as the Suez fiasco.

One man was responsible, Anthony Eden the Prime Minister. He was one of my greatest friends and had been so for more than 20 years.

LUDO: In this programme, on an event that has become the most debated and controversial British military operation since the War, Lord Mountbatten tells us not only of the pain and grief that Suez caused him, but of his own acute personal dilemma. For him the story began a full year beforehand.

L.M. As recently as 1955, the week before he became Prime Minister, he came and stayed at Broadlands with Nehru and Edwina and myself, and was charming, friendly, normal, absolutely his old self. And then he became Prime Minister. He'd been waiting for years and years to succeed old Sir Winston Churchill. I think it must have gone to his head. He changed. He became quite unlike himself. He started being extremely severe, a very strong disciplinarian. He frightened people.

One day the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Oliver, came to me and said, in the absence of the CIGS, General Templer, the Prime Minister had rung him up and said, I see in the Times that the Rifle Brigade have been moved. Don't you know that was my regiment? How dare you move my regiment now I'm Prime Minister. In future nothing will happen to the rifle brigade without my personal permission for it. Do you understand? He then was very, very rude to him. We all thought that pretty odd.

And there were other incidents I could quote but won't go on. Except to say that I didn't realise how physically ill he was, although we'd heard stories, until he broke down at the very end.

LUDO: That, said Mountbatten, was the background against which subsequent events had to be seen, one known to very few people at the time, and yet which was to have incalculable results.

L.M.: Now for the story itself. It starts on the evening of the 26th July, 1956, when I was out on one of my rare evenings out with my daughter Patricia at the Savoy. The head waiter came up and said 'the Prime Minister wants to see you at once.' So we got up, took a taxi, she dropped me at No. 10 Downing Street, I came in to an astonishing scene.

Seated round the Cabinet table were first of all the Prime Minister resplendent in the Order of the Garter, Lord Salisbury also wearing the Garter, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Kilmuir, the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, all in their Grand Crosses. I sat down and I whispered to the Lord Chancellor 'What's all this in aid of?' And he, thinking I was

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enquiring about the decorations, said 'We've just been having dinner with the King of Iraq.' 'No, I said, 'What's going to happen now?' He said 'Wait and see.'

In the meanwhile, the CIGS, General Templer, who'd been in bed, had hurriedly dressed and arrived just after me. The French Ambassador came in, the American Charge d'Affaires, the Law Officers of the Crown, and when we were all seated, the Prime Minister addressed us.

He said 'Gentlemen, I'm sorry to have to inform you we've just had information that Nassar has nationalised the Suez Canal. He's seized the Suez Canal company's head offices, he's going to run the Canal himself because of our failure to back the loan for the Aswan High Dam.'

'This is the end,' he said, 'we can't put up with any more of this. By this means he can blackmail us, he can put up the Canal dues, he'll run it very badly, this will absolutely stifle our trade, it will be impossible. Our whole position demands strong action. I want to seize the Canal, and take charge of it again.' He turned to me and he said 'You're in the chair for the Chiefs of Staff, aren't you'. I said 'Yes,' because Dickson the chairman was on the sick list. 'What do you propose?' I said 'Well, if you really want military action it must be done very quickly, without warning anybody. It happens that the Mediterranean fleet is complete at Malta. None of them are refitting. All of them are ready for an inspection by me next week. They're all at four hours notice. If you let me go next door I can ring up the duty commander at the Admiralty and send a flash message to raise steam for full speed at once. They'll be off before daylight. They've got 1,000 miles to do down to Cyprus; they'll get there in

plenty of time to embark the whole of the Royal Marine Commando Brigade, 1200 highly trained Marines with light vehicles. They can be taken in warships. And on the third morning, the 29th, just before daylight, they can run quietly into Port Said, they go alongside everywhere, land the Marines. If there's any trouble we've got aircraft carriers with air support, we've got gun power support. I don't think you have to fire a shot. They'll be so surprised we'll just take it. The Marines will ~~then~~ motor up the causeway in their jeeps, and they'll of course requisition vehicles. Within a couple of hours they'll be at El Qantara. There they'll stop. There won't be enough to go any further. Furthermore they will not be strong enough to stay there indefinitely against very strong attack. They will have to have, if we want to stay there, more troops behind them.' 'Yes, I see that', he said. 'What do you say, CIGS?' 'I agree with the First Sea Lord,' he said. 'We had 70,000 men on the Canal before. We want at least 60,000 or 70,000 there now, at least two or three divisions. We've got to mobilise them, get them ready. That'll take six or seven weeks.' 'Weeks,' said the Prime Minister. 'What about the Air Force?' The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Dermot Boyle, said 'Well, we can do it quicker than that but I'm afraid it'll take us three weeks to get the Metropolitan Air Force in position in Cyprus.' 'Three weeks?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Well, Prime Minister, as you know, the aircraft carriers are there immediately. We're ready in every way but we can't go the whole hog.' 'However', I said, I should think you're much better off if you're going to do anything to do it now quickly. Seize Port Said down to El Qantara and then you can negotiate from strength.' 'That's not good enough. I want to topple Nasser, I want to seize the Canal. No. I want the Chiefs of Staff to go away and look into it.'

Then the Law Officers of the Crown, one of them was there, chipped in I remember and said 'Prime Minister, you know he's doing nothing illegal in nationalising the Canal.' I don't care whether it's legal or not, I'm not going to let him do it. He's not going to get away with it.' He became very fierce. He ordered the Chiefs of Staff to do an all-night session and then prepare plans for seizing the whole of the Suez Canal militarily and to come back and see him at 11 O'clock the following morning. We did. We brought our plans with us and indeed the time scale was just the same as before. The Cabinet then ordered us to make all preparations for this military operation. So we went away to do so.

Two days later, the 29th, my old friend Admiral Nomy the Chief of the French Naval Staff, flew over. I'd known him since he was a young lieutenant commander. We were great friends. And they were absolutely ready. They had two carriers and a large Fleet to put at our disposal, and they were of course willing to serve under British command all the way through. I took him up to see our operations room and show him our dispositions. I then took him over to see the Minister of Defence, Sir Walter Monckton, another very old friend of mine.

LUDO: It was now becoming increasingly clear to his advisers and in particular to Mountbatten that, whatever the rights or wrongs of the affair, Eden was bent on an imperialistic course - as this answer to a question posed by Eden to Mountbatten shows.

L.M.: 'Prime minister, you sent a message enquiring whether it would be possible to pass ships through the Suez Canal against Egyptian wishes if they were escorted by

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naval vessels. There are two reasons why I do not consider this a feasible proposition.' I then enlarge on them in detail and then: 'It would not therefore be a practical operation to defend ships in convoy from field guns which the Egyptians could easily mount at safe places along the Canal bank and sink the ships in the Canal.' I then went on 'I should add that we have reliable information from a secret source that the Egyptians are preparing to block the Canal with sunken ships if necessary. In their present mood I believe that any attempt on our part to force our way through the Canal might make the Egyptians resort to blocking it.' Of course the Prime Minister will have had the same information. But he had so much stuff coming on his desk, he might not have noticed it. He had a habit of shutting his mind to things he didn't want to see. This time it brought it out into the open.

At all events he rang me up the next day, on an open line funnily enough, to ask about the two destroyers that we had sold to the Egyptians. He wanted me to hold them back. I said 'the Egyptians have paid for them, they own them. There's no means by which we can hold them back now, without causing very grave suspicion. However, they haven't got their ammunition or their torpedoes on board, they're no good without that. They haven't been paid for. I suggest you let them go without.' After some thought he said he thought he agreed with me.

He then went on to say, 'my dear Dickie, I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with me in this time of crisis. It's a great comfort and a great source of strength to me, and I do hope you agree with everything I'm doing.' It was an open line. How could I possibly answer?

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So I said, 'The Navy will do whatever you want,' and hung up.

LUDO: By now Mountbatten was so out of sympathy with what Eden was doing that he drafted a letter of resignation to be used, as he put it, 'when the time was appropriate.' The Minister of Defence, Sir Walter Monckton, to whom he showed it, said categorically that he couldn't resign. Mountbatten went ahead with planning the operation and on September 3rd the new First Lord, Lord Hailsham, took office.

L.M: I'd been warned by Monckton that he was what we now call a 'hawk'.

He'd been advocating the use of force. He was of the tough school. He warned me I was going to have difficulty with him. I had none. The very first time I saw him I said 'Do you realise what this plan involves? Do you realise that the Navy is going to be used to shoot up and butcher women and children? That's a nice use for you to authorise to the Navy on taking over as First Lord.' I left him a very worried man.

LUDO: Lord Mountbatten was no less worried himself and once again gave thought to his own personal position.

L.M: I then thought I really must put the record straight, so I sat down and drafted a letter to the Prime Minister saying 'I couldn't answer on the telephone when you asked me if I agreed with all you're doing. I'm writing now to tell you I don't. I don't agree with anything you're doing. I think what you're doing is terrible. It can only end in disaster, etc., etc.' It doesn't matter because the letter never went because when I showed it to the First Lord he said 'You can't send a letter like this to the

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Prime Minister.' I demanded he should consult the Minister of Defence, Monckton. Monckton said 'I'm afraid you can't. It's entirely inappropriate and improper for a Chief of Staff to address the Prime Minister on a political matter like this. You cannot send that letter.' So with great regret I didn't.

LUDO: With Lord Hailsham still in Mountbatten's words 'absolutely miserable and worried stiff' and Nigel Birch the Air Minister 'horrified at what the Air Force were going to be asked to do', Lord Mountbatten had a further meeting with Walter Monckton.

L.M: I said once more I thought we ought all to resign. Walter Monckton said 'Well in my case I shall have to consider it very carefully. It'll be the most difficult decision I've made in the whole of my career. But for you, Dickie, it's much worse. It's not straightforward for you. Chiefs of Staff can't resign when they're given military orders. You've got to carry out military operations. You're not the elected representative of the people. You're there to carry out your military duties, and if you resign it will shake the entire Navy. You can't do that. You think very carefully what you're going to do. For you the decision is 10 times as difficult as it is for me.'

I remember on the 5th of September General Keightley, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, asked to see me alone at the Admiralty. I was rather surprised at this. He said, he felt he could talk to me freely, rather differently from the other Chiefs of Staff, because he felt I was in sympathy with him. He said 'I'm worried stiff about this operation. It's going to start off with a lot of heavy civilian casualties, and where is it going to get us?'

He said 'At the end of it all, I'm still Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East. What's going to happen in the Middle East?' What's going to happen to all the Arab countries? Where are we going to in future? What's the long-term policy?' I said 'It's funny you should ask that, but I've been trying now for some time to get the Chiefs of Staff to go into that. I'm going to pursue it again.'

Then I took him along to see the Chiefs of Staff. It was a very difficult meeting. This was the meeting when he put up the proposal that we should not start with a landing, with fire support and so forth; we should start with air operations. We should have a fortnight of softening up, knocking out all the runways, air battes, knocking out the different air forces on the ground, parading our fleet up and down, so that if their ships came out we would sink them, perhaps in the end if necessary land in some remote beach and go across to take over across the desert. This didn't really appeal to my colleagues in the Chiefs of Staff. In fact when I spoke strongly in favour of this plan, it was then I think that General Templer called me yellow. I said, you may think it's yellow but it takes a damn sight more courage to stand up and talk to you bellicose people the way I'm doing now than to go along with you all.

We asked to see the Prime Minister and two days later he saw us with General Keightley. General Keightley put forward his plan. I could see it wasn't going very well with the Prime Minister, so I intervened at the appropriate moment. I said 'Prime Minister, would you allow me to talk absolutely freely to you without any restrictions about whether it has a political slant or not?' 'All right' he said, 'go right ahead. Say whatever you like.' So I did. I talked to him about the horrors that the present plan involved. I said 'do you realise that the only

places we can land in Port Said are in the built-up area? Do you realise that in order to land with safety we'll have to have preliminary bombardment by ships? Do you realise the naval gun trajectory at close range is practically flat? All our six-inch guns from the cruisers will go bursting into the town. And as for the great 15-inch guns of the French battleship Jean Barr, think of the mess they're going to make, think of the casualties and horrors, think of all the photographs the Egyptians will take. We'll be plastered round the world as assassins and baby killers. It's a horrible thought.'

I shook the Prime Minister. He said he'd give great thought to General Keightley's alternative plan. He took it to the Cabinet that afternoon. I have a very nice note written by Lord Hailsham, First Lord, after that Cabinet meeting. It appears that Eden spoke practically along the lines that I had used and said we must try and find a different way of doing this.

LUDO: But the alternative plan, said Mountbatten, still involved the use of force, and Walter Monckton was still unhappy.

L.M: We had a talk and I urged him, I said 'I think you should resign and explain to the country why you'd resigned.' He went and saw the Prime Minister. He offered him resignation. He came back and told me, he said 'I resigned, Dickie. The Prime Minister accepted my resignation.' 'Well,' I said, 'now are you going to speak?' He said, 'I can't, because he's forced me to accept the post of Paymaster General in the Cabinet. I said 'Why, in heaven's name?' 'He doesn't want me to leave the Cabinet. He said if I resign now it would break the government, the

government would fall, and it's a good government, Dickie, except for this bit of nonsense going on, and I don't want to be the cause of it falling. I feel by staying in the Cabinet I can hold the hotheads.' I said 'Hold the hotheads? There's only one hothead and that's the Prime Minister. How can you control him unless you go yourself and speak out freely?' 'I've made up my mind, Dickie, it's been difficult enough,' he said. 'Don't bully me.' I let it go.

LUDO: The next day Mountbatten received a letter confirming his own views, which the Admiral commanding our aircraft carriers had sent to the C-in-C of the Mediterranean Fleet.

L.M: This was from Admiral Power who'd been my Chief of Staff when I was Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, who'd been one of the most gallant submarine officers, a tremendous go-getter, a really brave man and a great fighter. This is what he said.

'Our pilots are trained for war, not for indiscriminate killing. They will, of course, do what they are told to do however repugnant it may be. But I wish to state most emphatically that I do not consider it either right or fair that they should be used in a manner which can only earn the obloquy of our own people and of the whole world.'

LUDO: Meanwhile the planning went ahead, and there were no less than 24 meetings, Mountbatten noted, between the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff, with very few other Cabinet ministers present.

L.M: He called it 'the Egypt Committee of the Cabinet,' which was just the Prime Minister,

the Minister of Defence, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Minister, Selwyn Lloyd, just a few. I only had a chance of talking to him quite alone once. He invited Dickson and me, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, to come down to lunch at Chequers on the 24th of September. On the way down in the car I asked Dickson if he'd be kind enough to leave us after lunch so I could talk alone with the Prime Minister. He did. When I found myself alone with Anthony Eden, I said, 'Now Anthony, can I talk to you as your old friend Dickie Mountbatten to Anthony Eden and not as the First Sea Lord to the Prime Minister? 'Of course, Dickie, by all means, of course. Say what you think'.

I then really took him apart. I said 'Anthony I can't think what you're doing. Don't you realise that this is going to end in disaster? Militarily it's a pushover. It's the easiest operation we've ever been asked to do. But from your point of view it's going to be a disaster. The world's going to be against you, the Commonwealth is going to be against you, there'll be a run on the pound sterling. You will never be allowed to go through with this. What's the point of starting something you can't finish? Now about what you're doing with Israel. Everybody's going to see through its being collusion. You can't prepare for weeks and weeks a great force and then conveniently find the Israelis go in so you can say you're going to intervene. The thing isn't going to work from beginning to end. For your own sake, for the sake of the country, for God's sake, give it up.'

He was effusive in his thanks. He said how much he appreciated having a friend who really spoke his mind. He didn't indicate what he was going to do and apparently it had absolutely no effect on him.

LUDO: What was now worrying Mountbatten and the Chiefs of Staff even more than the actual operation was what would be our position in the Middle East after it was over. They prepared a paper expressing their concern.

L.M.: It was circulated to the members of the Egypt Committee, and when the Prime Minister saw it he ordered its withdrawal. He didn't want to see any reason that could possibly stop him carrying out his intentions of attacking Egypt.

Afterwards General Keightley told me that about this time he asked to see the Prime Minister alone to ask him what his instructions would be to the C-in-C Middle East after the operation was over, and pointed out the difficulties that I was trying to point out. He got an imperial rocket. He was told to mind his own business and carry out his orders and not question what was going on in the future; he wasn't there to argue with the Prime Minister, he was there to do what he was told; and he was kicked out. Nothing would stop the Prime Minister. He was set absolutely in his way. It really was very worrying.

LUDO: We now come to what Mountbatten called 'the beginning of the end.'

L.M.: On the 25th of October the Prime Minister gave a dinner party for General Gruenther and Mrs. Gruenther. He was the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Edwina and I were asked to the dinner. At the end of dinner he came out in his usual friendly way. When he got into the front hall he put his arms, one round me, one round Edwina, and squeezed us and said 'Dear Dickie, he disapproves violently of everything I'm trying to do and yet nobody's working more loyally to make it possible for me to carry them out'. He said it in front of everybody.

Well, the next thing that happened of course was that on the 29th of October, as agreed, Israel advanced and as agreed we issued our ultimatum on the 30th, the French and British ultimatum telling both sides to stop fighting, both sides to withdraw 10 kilometres from the Canal. The next night I was ordered to sail the assault force from Malta. It was a very slow force of landing craft; it would take about five or six days to reach the landing beaches at Port Said. That morning also we ordered the carrier fleet, five great aircraft carriers, to start their strikes. The Air Force started their strikes. I really was worried. So I sat down and I finally wrote entirely on my own a letter to the Prime Minister which went as near resignation as I possibly could.

ACTOR reads letter: 'My dear Prime Minister, I know that you've been fully aware over these past weeks of my great unhappiness at the prospect of our launching military operations against Egypt. Indeed as recently as Thursday last week after your dinner to the Gruenthers you told Edwina and me that you realised how much I hated making the preparations which had been ordered. It's not the business of a serving officer to question the political decisions of his government, and although I did not believe that a just and lasting settlement of any dispute could be worked out under a threat of military action, I did everything in my power to carry out your orders as in duty bound, loyally and to the full, and making all the necessary naval preparations and building up a position in which we could negotiate from strength. Now, however, the decisive step of armed intervention by the British has been taken. Bombing has started and the assault convoy is on its way from Malta.'

I am writing to appeal to you to accept the resolution of the overwhelming majority of the United Nations to cease military operations, and to beg you to turn back the assault convoy before it is too late, as I feel that the actual landing of troops can only spread the war with untold misery and worldwide repercussions. You can imagine how hard it is for me to break with all service custom and write direct to you in this way. But I feel so desperate about what is happening that my conscience would not allow me to do otherwise.'

L.M.: The next day, the 3rd, he rang me up on the scrambler telephone. He said, 'My dear Dickie, thank you so much for your letter. I do appreciate having a friend who really speaks his mind. I like to know what you're thinking. I think it's splendid.' And I said, 'Are you going to let me turn back the assault convoy?' He said 'I'm not obliged to take your advice, you know.' I said 'Of course you're not obliged to take my advice. But may I nevertheless turn back the assault convoy?' He said 'No, certainly not. No, no.' And he hung up the telephone. I went back and looked for the First Lord. He'd gone away for the weekend. He'd just driven off; this was a Saturday. A meeting of the Egypt Committee of the Cabinet was called, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to get him back. So I rang up Scotland Yard. I gave the registration number of the private car he was driving; I said 'Stop this car and say that the driver must come straight back to the Admiralty.' In due course Guintin arrived. I told him what

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was happening. He thanked me. I didn't yet tell him about my letter to the Prime Minister; I wanted to think it over. And then I remember that I got actually - I drafted a final letter to the First Lord himself.

'However repugnant the task, the Navy will carry out its orders. Nevertheless, as its professional head, I must register the strongest possible protest of this use of my Service, and would ask you as the responsible Minister to convey that Protest to the Prime Minister. I recognise that a serving officer cannot back his protest by resignation at a time like this, so I must ask you to handle this whole matter on behalf of the Navy, bearing in mind all the implications, I must ask you after consulting the Prime Minister to give me an order to stay or to go.'

We came to the conclusion that was the nearest I could get to a letter of resignation. The next morning, the 5th, the British and French paratroops were dropped. I got a letter from the First Lord.

'My dear First Sea Lord, this is just to tell you that the Prime Minister has now confirmed the order I gave you yesterday.'

So I had to stay. I had to stay at my post although I made it very clear that I really hoped and expected to be told to go.

LUDO: That same day, November the 5th, the news of the Anglo-French invasion broke on an astonished world, and all hell broke loose.

L.M.: Meanwhile the operation went forward very successfully. Militarily it was a great success. The Marines rushed through with their transport up as far as El Qantara along the causeway. Then the Prime Minister ordered a ceasefire. The pressure from the Commonwealth, the pressure from the United Nations, and finally the threat of the pressure on the pound which caused Macmillan the Chancellor to say stop, they stopped. So where were we? We were where we could have been within the first four or five days of the nationalisation of the Canal. We were in exactly that position, with the world now against us, unable to move. It was a tragedy.

Ludo to cam

LUDO: Three days later the Queen's Annual Diplomatic Party took place at Buckingham Palace.

S51 T1

L.M.: The Prime Minister had asked her not to cancel it before, for fear of disturbing his position, and now that the operation had been called off there was no point in calling off the party. It went ahead under very electric circumstances. In the absence of the Prime Minister in Washington, the senior Minister was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Harold Macmillan. The Queen invited him in for a farewell drink when the party was over. He turned to me and said, 'Dickie is it true that they've blocked the Canal?' I said 'Yes it is.' 'Oh, God, how awful. This is the most terrible thing. We can't afford to have the Canal blocked; it would be ruinous for our trade. Why wasn't I told?' 'Why weren't you told?' I said. 'From the 30th of July onwards I have put it in writing, at every possible opportunity

I've said loud and clear that they will block the Canal, they'll block the Canal, they'll block the Canal. So you can't pretend you didn't know.' 'Why weren't any steps taken.' I said 'Nobody told me to take any steps, I took them myself. From the very moment I saw you were going ahead, I mobilised the Navy, the salvage resources as for war. They're all ready, they've been sailed out to the Mediterranean, they're ready to unblock the Canal.' 'Oh thank God' he said. 'You needn't worry' I said, 'we're not going to be allowed in'. 'What do you mean?' 'You don't think the United Nations are going to let us go into the Canal now to clear up our own mess. They'll insist on doing it. That'll slow things up.' 'Oh we can't afford to have any delay. We can't afford to have the Canal closed.' I said 'You should have thought of that before you went into the operation.' I said 'You were one of the few Ministers in the know from the beginning. You backed the Prime Minister to the hilt. You're just as guilty as he is, you've brought this trouble on yourselves. It's nothing to do with the Chiefs of Staffs, they've done their job.' And I walked away.

S52 T1

When Eden's health finally broke down, and he was unable to continue as Prime Minister, Macmillan took his place, and I remember saying to Edwina, this is the end of my career. After what I said to Macmillan at Buckingham Palace he'll never say another word to me again, he can't keep me as First Sea Lord. But he did. What is more, he listened to my advice more than anybody else. We became firm friends.

Edit

Ludo to cam

LUDO: If many people throughout the country and the world were shocked by what they

19.

considered the folly of Suez, they would have been even more shocked if they had known the steps that were taken to disguise the fact that we and the French had been in collusion with the Israelis.

L.M.: On the 7th of January, General Keightley asked me to read immediately and then decide what to do about the Naval Force Commander's report. Admiral Durnford Slater in paragraphs six and seven had put the dates of movements being ordered in which were ahead of the date on which Israel was supposed to carry out her unpremeditated attack on the Canal. This clearly proved collusion. So I called in those pages, went to the First Lord, the new one was Lord Selkirk, and I said, I required a political direction of what to do. He consulted his colleagues and said, these pages must be redrafted so as to conceal the fact that there was any collusion, and the originals must be burnt. This was done.

Edit  
Ludo to cam

LUDO: Lord Mountbatten ends his narrative of Suez by considering first the military and then the moral side of the operation.

L.M.: Many people think it was a failure. It wasn't. It was a pushover. It was the best combined operation I've ever taken part in. The plans were perfect. Everything went without a hitch. The casualties were minimal. In Port Said they had actually surrendered to us but Nasser ordered them to take back the surrender when he saw the United Nations were backing him. It wasn't the fault of the Chiefs of Staffs. It wasn't the fault of the Services. They did their stuff. It was entirely the fault of the way

the operation was laid in the face of every possible opposition. It was astonishing to me to see what one really persistent man could do if he was Prime Minister. He never let Parliament know what was going on. He never really let the Cabinet know. He formed this thing called the Egypt Committee of the Cabinet which consisted of only two or three handpicked Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff. We were unable to get our approaches through. I of course failed as I was bound to fail because the Chiefs of Staff have no standing. One or two of those Ministers might have. Monckton, Macmillan himself, Selwyn Lloyd. They didn't. The result was that Anthony Eden was able to go through with one of the most disastrous operations ever, entirely on his own. And we think that we have a secure democracy that can prevent that from happening.

LUDO: Two things, surely, emerge from the memoirs of Lord Mountbatten on Suez. First, for the historical record, his own understandable wish to clear his own yard-arm of any charges of being personally as opposed to professionally committed to the operation, and one which you may think he proves convincingly with chapter and verse. Secondly, the action, or rather the inaction, of Ministers like Monckton, Macmillan, Selwyn Lloyd and Hailsham who seem to have been fundamentally opposed to what Eden was doing, yet lacked the will to bring it to a halt by resigning. Indeed there may be some critics who will say that even though Mountbatten himself went as far as he felt he could, he still didn't go far enough.

Next week we shall be looking at Mountbatten's relationship with Lord Beaverbrook in the light of the newspaper vendetta which Beaverbrook and his Express group carried on against him for nearly 20 years.

*Memoirs*



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S MEMOIRS

When you saw the Prime Minister and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary this morning about another matter, you raised with them the question of the timing of the transmission of Lord Brabourne's Suez programme based on Lord Mountbatten's memoirs. You had earlier succeeded in persuading Lord Brabourne to postpone transmission until September, and it was agreed that you should try to put off transmission still further on the grounds that the situation in the Arab world was, if anything, even more critical than it had been when you made your original approach to Lord Brabourne last February.

**C. A. WHITMORE**

17 June 1980



## CABINET OFFICE

With the compliments of  
Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO  
*Secretary of the Cabinet*

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Your Ref: A01368

CABINET OFFICE
A 9147.....
18 FEB 1980
FILING INSTRUCTIONS
FILE No. ....

15th February 1980

*Dear Sir Robert,*

Thank you for your letter dated February 8th.

I was very pleased to be able to talk to you on the telephone yesterday evening when I was able to discuss with you the comments you have made on the scripts of a series which the B.B.C. are planning to transmit entitled "Lord Mountbatten Remembers".

As promised, I am writing now to confirm some of the points which we discussed:-

1. The B.B.C. have accepted that the Trustees gave certain undertakings to the Secretary of the Cabinet in a letter of Agreement dated March 30th 1969. It is written into the contract between the B.B.C. and the Trustees that any amendments or omissions required by the Government would be accepted.
2. With regard to the questions of confidentiality, I have discussed these with the B.B.C. and all the suggestions contained in your letter will be incorporated into revised versions of the scripts.
3. With regard to the points you make on matters of taste and judgment, as I mentioned to you on the telephone, the scripts which you received were the first drafts and had not been seen by the Trustees or members of the family. By the time that we had received your comments, all the important ones, e.g. the story about Admiral Edwards and the description of Sir Anthony Eden's illness by his valet, had already been removed at our request.
4. With regard to the timing of the actual transmission of the programmes, this of course does cause a considerable problem for the B.B.C. However, they accept that it is impossible for the programmes to be broadcast at the moment, but they are very much hoping to be able to do so in the first week of September, which would be roughly a year after my father-in-law's assassination. You agreed that we should contact you again in June to see if September transmission would be possible.

.../2

Prime Minister

*This seems to be going well.  
Sir Robert Armstrong has plainly  
been very persuasive.  
Agreed ref.*

*John*

1980

Sir Robert Armstrong, KCB., CVO.

15th February 1980

5. I agreed that we would now ask the B.B.C. to revise the scripts and to send them to you as soon as possible with all the alterations, omissions, and amendments.

Finally, I would like to thank you very much for all the trouble you have taken over this matter. I know that my father-in-law was most keen that these programmes should be transmitted reasonably soon after his death, although obviously that event took place sooner than he had anticipated. However, I would like to assure you that the Trustees and, of course, the family very much share your views regarding matters of taste and judgment.

Yours sincerely

Baroness

2.  
Memoirs

Ref. A01238

Prime Minister

MR. WHITMORE

You may like to see the personal letter Sir Robert  
Armstrong is proposing to send to Lord Brabourne (May A).  
He has taken account of your earlier comments.  
There is no need for you to look again at his  
more detailed letter immediately below.  
Lord Mountbatten's Memoirs

RMW  
29.

Thank you for your minute of 22nd January.

2. I have revised my two draft letters to Lord Brabourne in the light of the Prime Minister's comments in that and in her separate manuscript minute. You will see that I have taken out of the separate personal letter the last paragraph, about the possible effect of the programmes on Lord Mountbatten's reputation; but I have put in its place some paragraphs about the wounding remarks which are sprayed round the programmes, including a quotation from Lord Hailsham's book which I think the Prime Minister had in mind in her manuscript minute.

3.

I will touch base with you again before

I finally send the letters off.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

Temporarily Retained by 18/11/2014  
**THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS  
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT.**

Thank you very much

They are superb letters.

28th January, 1980

Retained material now released -  
see following page (Aug 2025)

R.A.

2.

*Memoirs*



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3. I am holding the letters until later in the week, to give Sir Philip Moore a chance to see what I propose to say. I will touch base with you again before I finally send the letters off.

*REA*

(Robert Armstrong)

28th January, 1980

*Thank you very much  
They are superb letters.*

*M.I.*

File

You were in touch with my Private Secretary in December about the proposed television programmes based on Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs. I have now had an opportunity of considering the scripts of which Sir Philip Moore, with your agreement, sent me copies.

In doing so I have had particularly in mind two considerations which seem to me to have a bearing on the matter:-

- (1) the undertakings entered into by the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement on 30th March 1969;
- (2) the relevant conclusions and recommendations in the report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd. 6386).

As to the first of these considerations, I have to say that, if the films from which these programmes are taken are part of the archives to which the Trustees' undertakings of 30th March 1969 relate, then it is arguable that the Trustees are already in breach of these undertakings by virtue of having, without consulting me or my predecessor, given access to the films to those who have constructed and edited the programmes. I should be grateful to know whether the Trustees have in fact asked the BBC to accept whatever conditions the Government of the day may impose upon the use of the material, and to accept any amendments or omissions that may be required in the public interest.

As to the second consideration, Part IV (paragraphs 88 to 94) of the Privy Counsellors' Report dealt specifically with the question of memoirs by former members of the public services. All except one of the six scripts which Sir Philip Moore sent to me deal with episodes and events with which Lord Mountbatten was concerned as a member of the public services. I have tried to consider the scripts in exactly the same way as I should consider a memoir by any other former member of the public service in a similar position. In particular, I have had regard to the considerations in paragraph 56 of the Privy Counsellors' Report.

To complete this introduction, let me add that I am putting to you in this letter nothing that I should not have put to Lord Mountbatten, if these programmes had been envisaged while he was still alive.

/Having

The Lord Brabourne

Having said so much about the way in which I have approached this matter, I think it right to put the following points to you.

### Programme 1

As presented, pages 20 to 22 give an account of events which is historically inaccurate, and contrive in the process to present Mr. Healey in a more unfavourable light than I believe Lord Mountbatten would have intended, had he had the sequence of events clearly in his mind when he made the film. The fact is that the amalgamation of the Ministry of Defence and the Service Departments took place while the Conservative Government was still in office in 1964, with general support from the Labour Opposition. The difference of opinion between Mr. Healey and Lord Mountbatten after October 1964 related to the relative priority to be attached to further integration of various functions (such as intelligence: cf. page 22) on the one hand and a comprehensive review of defence policy on the other, and Mr. Healey thought that, if there was to be a comprehensive review, it made sense to concentrate on that before going on to further integration. The account in these pages could be made both more accurate and fairer by the following changes:

Page 20, line 8: for "1964" read "1963".

lines 21 to 23: Delete, and substitute:

"So far so good. Mountbatten got his way, and on 31st March 1964 the Admiralty Flag was hauled down on the building overlooking the Horse Guards Parade, and the three Service Ministries were unified with the Ministry of Defence into one Ministry. It was, for Mountbatten, the crowning achievement of his Service career. But now a new obstacle arose in his path, and one he could hardly have foreseen.

lines 24 and 25: delete: "Well it went along very well while the Conservative Party were in power".

lines 26 to 30: delete: "Then we had Denis Healey .... I couldn't move him".

lines 34 and 35: delete: "with the connivance of Denis Healey".

Page 22, lines 26 to 31: delete: "and on .... achievement of his Service career".

### Programme 2

It has to be said that the whole of this programme presents a considerable problem. Though much of the Suez episode has been covered in various publications by former Ministers and in other writings, no other official participant has been given permission to give his own account.

/Lord Mountbatten

Lord Mountbatten has, in this as in other programmes, broken the confidence of his relations with Ministers and with colleagues. I have tried to be as sparing as I could in my proposals, on the basis that it is reasonable to allow Lord Mountbatten to explain his own position and defend his own record but that there should be a measure of discretion about the position of others. With these considerations in mind, I have to put the following points to you.

It seems to me undesirable and possibly detrimental to Anglo-French relations to quote the views of the Chief of the French Naval Staff. I propose the following deletions:-

Page 6, lines 18-21: "He was very excited .... lesson they long needed"

Page 6, lines 29-31: "and he spoke .... astonished Monckton, I remember"

In my judgment some of the references to the position of Lord Hailsham and other Ministers should be omitted, as going beyond what is necessary to make clear Lord Mountbatten's own position. I propose the following deletions:-

Page 8, lines 31-35: "He got absolutely worried .... in this awful position"

Page 9, line 24 to page 9a, line 1: "The next time I saw .... something to break this"

Incidentally, Lord Cilcennin cannot have been at the meeting referred to in lines 8 and following of page 9a: he left office when Lord Hailsham succeeded him.

There is a sentence on lines 14 and 15 of page 22 that seems to include Monckton and Macmillan as well as Selwyn Lloyd among "the real men who negotiated the collusion". I doubt whether that comment is fair or justified, or appropriate from someone who was one of their official advisers; and I do not think that it is in the public interest that it should stand; I therefore propose the deletion of:-

Page 22, lines 14 and 15: "the real men who negotiated the collusion".

At the end of this letter I shall make a general point about the timing of the broadcast of this programme.

### Programme 3

I believe that it will cause considerable resentment in Canada, and perhaps some detriment to Anglo-Canadian relations if it is stated that the Canadian contingent was included in the Dieppe raid against Lord Mountbatten's will and only for political reasons. I therefore propose the following deletion:-

Page 3, lines 47 and 48: "(and I was forced to take them for political reasons)"

So much for questions of confidentiality and propriety. I should like to put to you three points on matters of taste and judgment.

The first relates to Lord Mountbatten's account in Programme 1 of his dealings, when he was First Sea Lord, with Admiral Sir Ralph Edwards. This passage is, if I may say so, not only indiscreet but offensive; and would certainly cause great distress to Lady Edwards, who is still alive. I hope that you will consider the deletion of the whole passage, from line 33 on page 11 to line 31 on page 14 of Programme 1.

The second relates to the references, on page 2 of Programme 1 and again on page 12 of Programme 4, to an affair which one Commander-in-Chief in South East Asia was having with the wife of another; and the "guilty" Commander-in-Chief appears to be identified as Air Marshal Sir Richard Pierse. It seems to me that these references could still cause considerable pain to relatives of those concerned, and could well be omitted. If that view was accepted, it would mean the deletion of:-

Programme 1, page 2, lines 21-23: "some astonishing behaviour ....  
Commander-in-Chief"

Programme 4, page 12, lines 4-13: "what was worrying Sir James ....  
told him off quite severely"

The third point arises on page 2 of Programme 2, where Lord Mountbatten reports his valet, who had formerly been "a footman" at 10 Downing Street, as saying that "frequently he would go into the Cabinet Room and find the Prime Minister (Eden) had passed out unconscious". The most charitable thing that can be said of this is that it is gross exaggeration. Eden occasionally complained of feeling unwell, but officials who were close to him at the time do not remember any occasion on which he fainted or "passed out unconscious" in the Cabinet Room, let alone "frequent" occurrences of that kind. Quite apart from whether the gossip reported is true, I think it diminishes Lord Mountbatten to be retailing that sort of second-hand backstairs tittle-tattle. I do not believe that anything would be lost by the deletion of lines 22 to 32 of page 2 of Programme 2.

Finally, I have to make a request to you on the timing of the broadcasting of these programmes. It is judged that the showing of the Suez programme could have untoward consequences while the situation in the Arab world is as critical as it is at present. There would be no objection to the BBC going ahead with the other programmes, if the Suez programme could be taken out of the series and deferred to some more propitious time; but, if it is felt that the series must stand as a whole, I have to ask that it should all be deferred for the time being. For obvious reasons I cannot say for how long; that depends on events. But it might well need to be for some months.

File

I am sending herewith my "official" letter about the proposed television programmes of Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs "Lord Mountbatten Remembers". What I shall write in this letter is more by way of personal comment. I greatly admired Lord Mountbatten - who did not? - and have reason to be grateful for much kindness and consideration which he showed to me. His public standing and reputation are rightly high. My fear is that the publication of these programmes may do nothing to enhance it.

My first point is on the matter of accuracy. It is not my business to check the scripts for accuracy, and I have not done so. I have, however, noted in my other letter some points of inaccuracy which have come to light in connection with the scrutiny of the scripts for other purposes. There are others: for example, though Lord Mountbatten may (for all I know) have been responsible with Krishna Menon for inventing the title "Head of the Commonwealth" (see Programme 5, pages 13 and 14), that cannot have been in February 1952, because by then the title had already been in use for some time. But it goes wider than that. I have been disturbed by some of the comments I have received from those who helped me go through the scripts, particularly on the Suez programme. One comment was that it is muddled and inaccurate; another that it is not history but fiction. These comments and the inaccuracies I have noted make me think that there are probably others. I fear that Lord Mountbatten's account, if published, may be contested: for instance, though I have not consulted Lord Selkirk, I gather that he will say that the transactions between himself and Lord Mountbatten described in lines 15 to 21 on page 21 of Programme 2 simply did not occur.

Whether anything can be done about this, and if so what, is (I am glad to say) a problem for you and your fellow Trustees and not for me. But I should have thought that at the very least the general introduction to the programmes, and in particular an introduction to Programme 2 (which does not have one at present), should include something to the effect that Lord Mountbatten was recalling events in some cases long after they had taken place, and may not always have remembered them quite as they happened.

/My second

The Lord Brabourne

PRIVATE AND PERSONAL

My second point relates to the wounding way in which Lord Mountbatten treats a great many of the people to whom he refers, including a number of people with whom he was in a relationship of confidence and trust, as either an official colleague or as an official servant. I have drawn attention to some instances of this in my other letter, but it goes much wider than that. He is deeply wounding about Lord Avon; pretty wounding about Mr. Harold Macmillan; and very wounding, too, about other Ministers and about many of his colleagues in the Armed Services and on the Chiefs of Staff. Some of those concerned are still alive; others are no longer alive, and are themselves unable to reply, while their relatives survive to suffer the distress which these programmes will cause. I cannot help wondering whether this can really be what Lord Mountbatten would himself have wanted, had he lived to think about it. There is a lack of generosity about so many of these comments; and this, combined with the doubts about the accuracy of some of what is said, creates an impression that he was not above distorting the picture or putting his former masters, friends and colleagues into an unfavourable perspective in order to suit his own version of history or to put himself in a better light.

I am reminded of a sentence which I read in the first chapter of Lord Hailsham's book The Door Wherein I Went, which read:

"I have been trained to a profession which is taught that it is wrong to give other people away".

He - and others to whom Lord Mountbatten refers - might be entitled to ask whether they were wrong to think that the Royal Navy was another such profession.

This again is a problem for you and your fellow Trustees, not for me; but I did not feel that I could write without making clear the impressions which the scripts had made on me. That is why I have written this as a separate and purely personal letter.

Memoirs



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LORD MOUNTBATTEN'S MEMOIRS

The Prime Minister has seen your minute A01137 of 16 January 1980 about Lord Mountbatten's memoirs and has read the scripts which you submitted with your minute.

The Prime Minister agrees with your general approach, although she has commented that however much she regrets the total breach of confidence, the self-justification and the attacks on others, she does not think that tinkering with the scripts will help very much, except to delete the worst features.

She also agrees with the warning to Lord Brabourne about accuracy but she feels that we must leave to him any judgement about the effect of publication on Lord Mountbatten's standing in the eyes of the public.

The Prime Minister has also said that she is very concerned about the effect on Mr. Harold Macmillan and Lady Avon if these films are shown publicly. She feels that they too should have some forewarning of what the scripts contain. She accepts that there is probably nothing that Lady Avon can do, but she thinks Mr. Macmillan may wish to reply, as may Lord Hailsham too. The Prime Minister would be grateful if you could consider how Mr. Macmillan and Lady Avon might best be warned.

/Since commenting

- 2 -

Since commenting on your minute the Prime Minister has also written the attached manuscript minute to you about the memoirs. You will wish to take this into account too.

22 January 1980



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Lord Mountbatten's memoirs.

Sir Robert Amshurst,

After I had written the note at the end of your memo, I had a word with Lord Cairns. I had the impression from him that what is proposed is contrary to the terms of the Trust. I haven't seen the Trust instrument, and can't therefore judge but it appears from the reasons I recollect that you do have made these films from the material in the archives without reference to you was a breach of good faith. Is that correct?

I find myself even more concerned now than a few hours ago at the wording recently made against so many people. Is Lord Brahan not concerned about that? At the beginning of Lord Hailsham's biography (which I have but can't find) there is a passage



Ref. A01137

MR. WHITMORE

Mrs. Castle's  
memoirs  
to follow.

1.  
Will need  
sup  
the weekend  
See notes at end  
out



Prime Minister.

I am afraid Lord Mountbatten does not come out of these scripts terribly well.

The deletions it is proposed to ask for seem to me to be the very minimum.

Content for Sir Robert Armstrong to write on the lines of his two drafts?

Stahl.  
17.

I have to trouble the Prime Minister on another "memoirs" issue.

2. It seems that Lord Mountbatten decided to put his recollections on to film, rather than write them down. The film was made about eight years ago, and was deposited, together with certain papers relating to his official activities, in an archive under the control of a trust (the Broadlands Archives Settlement). In consideration of permission to retain control of the contents of the archives, the Trustees gave my predecessor, Sir Burke Trend, formal assurances and undertakings about the custody of and access to the papers. These undertakings apply to any films, tape recordings or photographs in the Trust which have a security classification. I am advised that I could not rely on these undertakings as a means of enforcing censorship of the filmed memoirs, though Lord Brabourne (for the Trustees) accepts an obligation to clear with me the particular use of them now proposed.

3. These memoirs were drawn upon for the series of television programmes which Lord Mountbatten himself presented some years ago. What was not used then has now been drawn upon for a second series of programmes, with linking commentary by Ludovic Kennedy, which the BBC would like to put out shortly. The subjects of the programmes are:

1. The argument with other Service chiefs and Ministers about the unification of the Ministry of Defence and the Service departments in 1964-65 (Mountbatten was Chief of the Defence Staff).
2. Suez (Mountbatten was First Sea Lord).
3. Beaverbrook's feud with Mountbatten.
4. Mountbatten in South East Asia, 1944-45.
5. Mountbatten as Viceroy of India.
6. The Abdication: Mountbatten and the Duke of Windsor.

4. I have myself read all the scripts (which I attach), and have had them vetted by the relevant Departments. I propose to write two letters to Lord Brabourne: one with a number of suggestions for deletions from the scripts on the grounds of propriety and taste, and one expressing some more personal misgivings about them. I attach drafts herewith.



5. All the programmes are indiscreet. The first, for instance, contains a lively account of Mountbatten's row with the other Service chiefs about the unification of the Services (Programme 1, pages 17 to 20). Programme 4 does not mince words about his opinion, or that of Sir John Dill, about the Commanders whom he found in South East Asia - and "sacked" within a year (Programme 4, pages 9 to 14). Programme 5 has some plain speaking about Mahatma Gandhi and about Jinnah, and an extraordinary account of how he was persuaded to accept the Viceroyalty (Programme 5, pages 1 to 7). But there is relatively little in these programmes to which I see a need to take exception.

6. The main problem is Programme 2, about Suez. The purpose of this programme is to show that Mountbatten was right all along the line about Suez, and that Eden was not only wrong but secretive, deceitful and impervious to the good advice he was getting. Eden is not the only Minister to be put into an unfavourable light: there are unflattering accounts of Macmillan (pages 19 and 20), Lord Selkirk (page 21) and Lord Hailsham, then First Lord of the Admiralty (pages 8 to 10).

7. I have shown Lord Hailsham the passages that refer to him. He has said that he would like me to deal with these passages as I think right, and will accept without question whatever I propose. He has also said - as have others who have seen the script - that it is muddled and inaccurate - in his own words "not history but fiction".

8. If that is right, the programme, if published, will discredit itself - and diminish its author. But my concern is not with accuracy but with propriety. I have considered very carefully what I should do, in consultation with Sir Michael Palliser and Sir Frank Cooper. I think that another Chief of Staff, without Lord Mountbatten's special position, would be expected to be much more discreet. Nonetheless, I have come to the conclusion that I should confine myself to minimal comments and suggestions. Suez is now 23 years ago - longer than the 15 years prescribed by the Radcliffe Report - and a great deal has already come out. Lord Mountbatten was, by virtue of his membership of the Royal Family, a special case - and he behaved like it. And the script has been in the hands of the BBC and of Ludovic Kennedy: to that extent the pass is already sold.



9. I am therefore proposing to make relatively few requests for deletions or changes to the scripts.

10. I have made no comments on the programme about the Abdication, which raises no problems for the Government. I understand that The Queen has read it, and is not too bothered.

11. I am, however, proposing - in my second letter to Lord Brabourne - to send a general warning about accuracy, and about the effect that the publication of these programmes could have on his father-in-law's standing and reputation. These matters are his business and not mine; but I think that he should at least be put on his guard.

12. I should be grateful if you could let me know whether the Prime Minister is content that I should proceed as I propose.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

16th January, 1980

① I agree with your general approach. However much I regret the total breach of confidence, the self-instruction and the effects on others, I do not think that interfering with the script will help very much, except to delete the worst.

② I agree with the warning to Lord B. about accuracy - but I feel we must leave to his judgment the effect of publication on Lord M's standing in the eyes of the public.

③ I am really very concerned about Harold Nicolson (the late Lord Supt) and Clangis Cider. They too should have some forewarning of what the script contains. There is nothing that Clangis Cider can do but Harold may wish to reply as may Lord H. M.I.



DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO  
LORD BRABOURNE

You were in touch with my Private Secretary in December about the proposed television programmes based on Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs. I have now had an opportunity of considering the scripts of which Sir Philip Moore sent me copies.

In doing so I have had particularly in mind two considerations which seem to me to have a bearing on the matter:-

- (1) the undertakings entered into by the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives Settlement on 30th March 1969;
- (2) the relevant conclusions and recommendations in the report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors on Ministerial Memoirs (Cmnd. 6386).

Part IV (paragraphs 88 to 94) of that Report dealt specifically with the question of memoirs by former members of the public services. All except one of the six scripts which Sir Philip Moore sent to me deal with episodes and events with which Lord Mountbatten was concerned as a member of the public services. I have tried to consider the scripts in exactly the same way as I should consider a memoir by any other former member of the public service in a similar position. In particular, I have had regard to the considerations in paragraph 56 of the Privy Counsellors' Report.

To complete this introduction, let me add that I am putting to you in this letter nothing that I should not have put to Lord Mountbatten, if these programmes had been envisaged while he was still alive.

Having said so much about the way in which I have approached this matter, I think it right to put the following points to you.



### Programme 1

As presented, pages 20 to 22 give an account of events which is historically inaccurate, and contrive in the process to present Mr. Healey in a more unfavourable light than I believe Lord Mountbatten would have intended. The fact is that the amalgamation of the Ministry of Defence and the Service Departments took place while the Conservative Government was still in office in 1964, with general support from the Labour Opposition. The difference of opinion between Mr. Healey and Lord Mountbatten after October 1964 related to the relative priority to be attached to further integration of various functions (such as intelligence: cf. page 22) on the one hand and a comprehensive review of defence policy on the other, and Mr. Healey thought that, if there was to be a comprehensive review, it made sense to concentrate on that before going on to further integration. The account in these pages could be made both more accurate and fairer by the following changes: Page 20, line 8: for "1964" read "1963".

lines 21 to 23: delete, and substitute:

"So far so good. Mountbatten got his way, and on 31st March 1964 the Admiralty Flag was hauled down on the building overlooking the Horse Guards Parade, and the three Service Ministries were unified with the Ministry of Defence into one Ministry. It was, for Mountbatten, the crowning achievement of his Service career. But now a new obstacle arose in his path, and one he could hardly have foreseen.

lines 24 and 25: delete: "Well it went along very well while the Conservative Party were in power".



lines 26 to 30: delete: "Then we had

Denis Healey . . . . I couldn't move him".

lines 34 and 35: delete: "with the connivance of  
Denis Healey".

Page 22, lines 26 to 31: delete: "and on . . . . achievement  
of his Service career".

### Programme 2

It has to be said that the whole of this programme presents a considerable problem. Though much of the Suez episode has been covered in various publications by former Ministers and in other writings, no other official participant has been given permission to give his own account. I do not want to suggest the omission of the whole programme, and I have tried to be as sparing as I could in my proposals, on the basis that it is reasonable to allow Lord Mountbatten to explain his own position and defend his own record but that there should be a measure of discretion about the position of others. With these considerations in mind, I have to put the following points to you.

It seems to me undesirable and possibly detrimental to Anglo-French relations to quote the views of the Chief of the French Naval Staff. I propose the following deletions:-

Page 6, lines 18-21: "He was very excited . . . .  
lesson they long needed"

Page 6, lines 29-31: "and he spoke . . . . astonished  
Monckton, I remember"

In my judgment some of the references to the position of Lord Hailsham and other Ministers should be omitted, as going beyond what is necessary to make clear Lord Mountbatten's own position. I propose the following deletions:-



Page 8, lines 31-35: "He got absolutely worried . . . .  
in this awful position"

Page 9, line 24 to page 9a, line 1: "The next time  
I saw . . . . something to break this"

Incidentally, Lord Cilcennin cannot have been at the meeting referred to in lines 8 and following of page 9a: he left office when Lord Hailsham succeeded him.

There is a sentence on lines 14 and 15 of page 22 that seems to include Monckton and Macmillan as well as Selwyn Lloyd among "the real men who negotiated the collusion". I doubt whether that comment is fair or justified, or appropriate from someone who was one of their official advisers; and I therefore propose the deletion of:-

Page 22, lines 14 and 15: "the real men who negotiated the collusion".

### Programme 3

I believe that it will cause considerable resentment in Canada, and perhaps some detriment to Anglo-Canadian relations if it is stated that the Canadian contingent was included in the Dieppe raid against Lord Mountbatten's will and only for political reasons. I therefore propose the following deletion:-

Page 3, lines 47 and 48: "(and I was forced to take them for political reasons)"

So much for questions of confidentiality and propriety. I should like to put to you three points on matters of taste and judgment.

The first relates to Lord Mountbatten's account in Programme 1 of his dealings, when he was First Sea Lord, with Admiral Sir Ralph Edwards. This passage is, if I may say so, not only indiscreet but offensive; and



would certainly cause great distress to Lady Edwards, who is still alive. I hope that you will consider the deletion of the whole passage, from line 33 on page 11 to line 31 on page 14 of Programme 1.

The second relates to the references, on page 2 of Programme 1 and again on page 12 of Programme 4, to an affair which one Commander-in-Chief in South East Asia was having with the wife of another; and the "guilty" Commander-in-Chief appears to be identified as Air Marshal Sir Richard Pierse. It seems to me that these references could still cause considerable pain to relatives of those concerned, and could well be omitted. If that view was accepted, it would mean the deletion of:-

Programme 1, page 2, lines 21-23:

"some astonishing behaviour ....

Commander-in-Chief"

Programme 4, page 12, lines 4-13:

"what was worrying Sir James .... told him off quite severely"

The third point arises on page 2 of Programme 2, where Lord Mountbatten reports his valet, who had formerly been "a footman" at 10 Downing Street, as saying that "frequently he would go into the Cabinet Room and find the Prime Minister (Eden) had passed out unconscious". The most charitable thing that can be said of this is that it is gross exaggeration. Eden occasionally complained of feeling unwell, but officials who were close to him at the time do not remember any occasion on which he fainted or "passed out unconscious" in the Cabinet Room, let alone "frequent" occurrences of that kind. Quite apart from whether the gossip reported is true, I think it diminishes Lord Mountbatten to be retailing that sort of second-hand backstairs tittle-tattle. I do not believe that anything would be lost by the deletion of lines 22 to 32 of page 2 of Programme 2.



Finally, I have to make a request to you on the timing of the broadcasting of these programmes. It is judged that the showing of the Suez programme could have untoward results while the situation in the Arab world is as critical as it is at present. There would be no objection to the BBC going ahead with the other programmes, if the Suez programme could be taken out of the series and deferred to some more propitious time; but, if it is felt that the series must stand as a whole, I have to ask that it should all be deferred for the time being. For obvious reasons I cannot say for how long: that depends on events. But it might well need to be for some months.

PERSONAL



DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG  
TO LORD BRABOURNE

I am sending herewith my "official" letter about the proposed television programmes of Lord Mountbatten's filmed memoirs "Lord Mountbatten Remembers". What I shall write in this letter is more by way of personal comment. I greatly admired Lord Mountbatten - who did not? - and have reason to be grateful for much kindness and consideration shown to me. His public standing and reputation are rightly high. My fear is that the publication of these programmes may diminish rather than enhance it.

My first point is on the matter of accuracy. It is not my business to check the scripts for accuracy, and I have not done so. I have, however, noted in my other letter some points of inaccuracy which have come to light in connection with the scrutiny of the scripts for other purposes. There are others: for example, though Lord Mountbatten may (for all I know) have been responsible with Krishna Menon for inventing the title "Head of the Commonwealth" (see Programme 5, pages 13 and 14), that cannot have been in February 1952, because by then the title had already been in use for some time. But it goes wider than that. I have been disturbed by some of the comments I have received from those who helped me go through the scripts, particularly on the Suez programme. One comment was that it is muddled and inaccurate; another that it is not history but fiction. The inaccuracies I have noted make me fear that there are probably others. I fear that Lord Mountbatten's account, if published, may be contested: for instance, though I have not consulted Lord Selkirk, I gather that he will say that the



transactions between himself and Lord Mountbatten described in lines 15 to 21 on page 21 of Programme 2 simply did not occur.

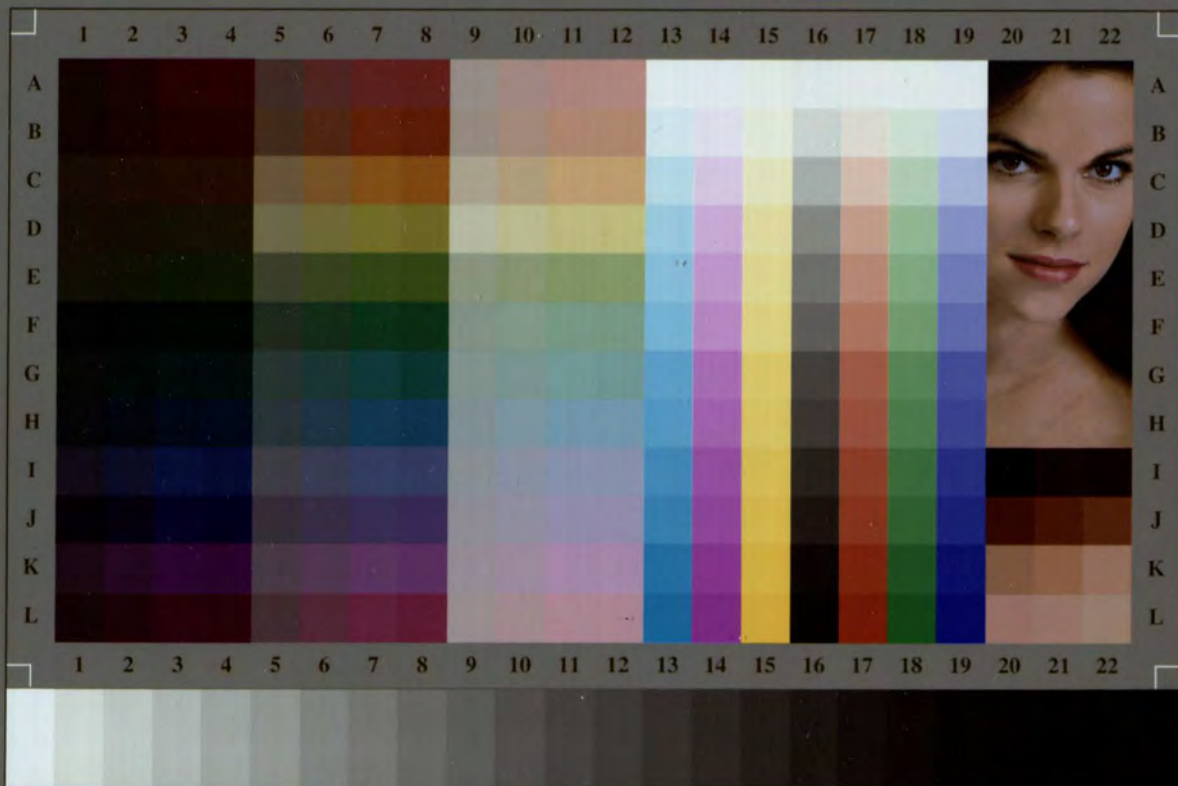
Whether anything can be done about this, and if so what, is (I am glad to say) your problem rather than mine. But I should have thought that at the very least the general introduction to the programmes, and in particular an introduction to Programme 2 (which does not have one at present), should include something to the effect that Lord Mountbatten was recalling events in some cases long after they had taken place, and may not always have remembered them quite as they happened.

My second point relates to the impression of Lord Mountbatten that will be left on the audience by these programmes. There is an element of what I can only describe as egotism and lack of generosity about them; and, especially if it is felt that he has distorted the picture to suit his own version of history or to put himself in a better light, the broadcasting of these programmes could diminish the reputation of a great man. But, again, that is for you, and not for me.

LONDON

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