

Ref. A01137

MR. WHITMORE



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?

Mrs. Castle's memoirs to follow.

I have to trouble the Prime Minister on another "memoirs" issue. *Stahl. 17.*

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 not sure (some forewarning) classic references do very concerned about Harold Nicolson (see and Clang's letter. They too should have of what the script contains. There is nothing that 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