

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 Anstruther,

After I had written the note at the end of your memo, I had a word with Lord Cairncross. 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 request of Lord Hailsham's biography (which I have but can't find) there is a passage

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

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.