



CABINET OFFICE

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*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



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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.





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

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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