**Steak au Poivre**

(Steak with Peppercorns)

3 tablespoons black peppercorns

four 1/2-pound boneless shell

steaks, each about 3/4 inch thick

1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/4 cup minced shallot

1/2 cup Cognac

1 cup beef broth

2/3 cup heavy cream

watercress sprigs for garnish

Crush the peppercorns coarse with the bottom of a heavy skillet in a heavy-duty

sealable plastic bag or between 2 sheets of wax paper and press the pepper into both

sides of the steaks, patted dry. Let the steaks stand at room temperature, covered

loosely with wax paper, for I hour. In a large heavy skillet heat the oil and the butter

over moderately high heat until the foam subsides and in the fat saut6 the steaks, sea-

soning them with salt, for 2 to 2-1/2 minutes on each side, or until they are just springy to

the touch, for medium-rare meat. Transfer the steaks with a slotted spatula to a platter

and keep them warm, covered loosely.

Pour off almost all the fat remaining in the skillet, add the shallot, and cook it over

moderate heat, stirring, until it is softened. Add the Cognac and boil it until it is re-

duced to a glaze. Add the broth and boil the mixture until it is reduced by half. Add the

cream and boil the mixture, stirring occasionally, until it is thickened slightly. Season

the sauce with salt and pour it into a heated sauceboat. Garnish the steaks with

the watercress and serve the sauce separately. Serves 4.