

INTERVIEW WITH  
General G. R. Pearkes

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



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This interview is being conducted with General G.R. Pearkes in his home in Victoria, British Columbia on April 19, 1974. Present for the interview are Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff, General Pearkes, and Mrs. Pearkes.

DR. BURG: Were you born in British Columbia?

GEN. PEARKES: No, I was born in England. I came out to Canada in 1906 at the age of eighteen.

DR. BURG: And your parents had moved out here?

GEN. PEARKES: My mother moved out and my sister, and I had a brother. My brother went south and he died some five or six years ago. My mother died some years ago and my sister is still living out here.

DR. BURG: Were you educated then in Canada?

GEN. PEARKES: No, I was educated in England.

DR. BURG: And where may I ask?

GEN. PEARKES: Berkhamsted Grammar School.

DR. BURG: And when you came here to Canada, did you enter the military?



PEARKES: No, I came out originally to a farm which the head master of my school had bought and sort of kept for any boys from his school who wanted to come out to the colonies then and to learn farming. And I came out there and stayed there for a year or so. Then I went and worked for another man, George F. Root, who was related to Mr. Root of the United States. He had a big farm of shorthorn cattle and Percheron horses. I stayed there for a while and then I took up a homestead at Rocky Mountain House. And that wasn't entirely successful, and so by the time I just proved up why I then joined the Mounted Police. I was in the Mounted Police until war broke out when I purchased my discharge and went overseas.

BURG: Now did you get over in 1914 or 1915?

PEARKES: No, 1915, the spring of '15.

BURG: And what unit were you in, General?

PEARKES: I went with the Second Canadian Mounted Rifle from Victoria. We left our horses behind and went into the trenches.





BURG: Almost as soon as you got there?

PEARKES: Well, yes. We were asked before we left Victoria whether we'd volunteer to go as infantry, because infantry were needed more than cavalry at the time. But they said they'd send our horses over and we might or might not get them again. Well, we saw them for about two weeks. And then we trained as straight infantry, went into the trenches.

BURG: But you did get some infantry training?

PEARKES: Oh, yes, yes.

BURG: They didn't just throw you in?

PEARKES: No, we'd had some infantry training.

BURG: Did you go into the trenches in Flanders?

PEARKES: Yes.

BURG: That was your first experience then?

PEARKES: In Flanders, yes.

BURG: You weren't there when that gas attack--

PEARKES: No, no, we came just after the gas attack. The gas attack was in April; I think we got over in June.

BURG: Oh, yes. Were you a trooper, General?

PEARKES: Yes, I was a trooper then.



BURG: Let me ask you, how did you react to that kind of warfare? Do you remember how you felt when you first went in those trenches?

PEARKES: Yes, I felt it was interesting and thrilling and I was excited about it.

BURG: Good Lord! You were a young man.

PEARKES: I was a young man and I remember I had no sort of feeling of despondency. I suppose when all was said, I rather liked the excitement and the interest there. I felt I was doing something.



BURG: I think I understand. Did you come to change your mind as the war went on, did you lose that?

PEARKES: No, as one got more senior you realized the awfulness of it, the losses. But I was enthusiastic about the war and interested in the various commands that I had, because I got my commission and I went on and finally commanded a battalion at the end of the war. And it seemed to me there was something new and interesting with each step. You can't say you enjoyed it, but I was interested, and I liked working with fellowmen and I had long, oh, ever since I was a boy I had thought I'd

like to be a soldier and it was unforeseen circumstances which brought me out to Canada and I didn't go into the army.

BURG: Now, General, you won a Victoria Cross in that war.

PEARKES: Yes.

BURG: When was that?

PEARKES: The battle of Passchendaele in 1917.

BURG: The late summer and the early autumn of 1917.

PEARKES: Yes, it was, wait a minute, it was the 31st of October.

BURG: Now can you tell me briefly what were you doing that you got that?

PEARKES: Well, I was a company commander, and we were in an attack and things didn't go very well owing to the difficulties of terrain, the mud, and that sort of thing, and the enemy's counterbarrage caught a lot of our people. The troops on right and left failed to make progress, but my company and remnants of those who joined us were able to get up to the top of





the ridge and we were able to hold on at the end until night when relief came and more troops came in.

BURG: So your men were up on top of that ridge; you got up and dug in.

PEARKES: We got up practically to the top of the ridge. We dug in there and that enabled other troops to come up to fan out on either side and to capture the ridge a few days after.

BURG: So it could be done this way; it could be widened out from your positions.

PEARKES: Yes, that was the idea, from our right. It was just a little hold that we got. We were the only people who got up that day and it was considered quite an exploit; it was really a good deal of luck.

BURG: I suppose so. Did you receive your Victoria Cross from the hands of the King?

PEARKES: From the King, yes.



BURG: That must have been a very exciting moment for you.

PEARKES: Oh, yes.

BURG: Did they take you from France over to England especially for that?

PEARKES: I think I got, yes, really, I got leave to go over for the investiture.

BURG: Did the King say anything to you when he presented your medal?

PEARKES: Yes, he made some remark; I've forgotten what it was. He asked me whether I was all right because I had been wounded at the time, whether I had recovered from my wounds.

BURG: I see. Had these been shell fragments or had you been hit by rifle fire?

PEARKES: Well, I think it was a rifle shot which hit me on that occasion.

BURG: You're the first man I've ever had the privilege of talking to who won the Victoria Cross.

PEARKES: Well, thank you. That's very kind of you.

BURG: I've never met one who has, and I'm very proud.

PEARKES: Well, there aren't many of us left.

BURG: No, there never were very many of you who got it, never very many.

PEARKES: No. I think there were about seventy Canadians that won the Victoria Cross, but I don't think there are more than a dozen left. Of course some were posthumous awards.

BURG: Yes, many of them were. Now when the armistice came, you were commanding a battalion.

PEARKES: Yes, I was commanding a battalion when the armistice came. Actually, I had been wounded again and I was over in England on Armistice Day, but I was able to go back to my battalion shortly after that. I was with them until the [end of the] war came and I brought them back to Toronto where they were demobilized. And then I went back to England



to the staff college, and I stayed in the regular army from then on.

BURG: You stayed in the Canadian army?

PEARKES: In the Canadian regular army, yes.

BURG: At staff college, were any of the later World War II leaders part of your class at staff college?

PEARKES: Yes, they were. Brooke and Gort were two, Alanbrooke was a student; Lord Gort sat next to me; we shared the desk. The desks were in groups of two and Freyberg was another one, oh, they were rather a distinguished class, at that time.

BURG: They were all there. That's very impressive.



PEARKES: It was interesting, yes, Phillip Neame was there also.

MRS. PEARKES: 1919.

PEARKES: 1919.

BURG: Now let me ask you if you can think back and recollect how did Alanbrooke, later Lord Alanbrooke, how did he strike you



as a man in 1919 when you met him? What did you think of him?

PEARKES: Well, we weren't particular friends. I'd say he wasn't one of my chums.

BURG: Was it because you weren't drawn to him?

PEARKES: I wasn't particularly drawn to him; I thought he was rather a cold fish. Look here, this isn't going to be recorded.

BURG: If you want that closed, we'll be happy to close it.

PEARKES: Oh, no, no, you close that! I'm not making any comments.

BURG: But we do appreciate having your opinions because they're valuable to us.

PEARKES: There were many other students who impressed me far more than Alanbrooke did. And Alanbrooke was a brilliant student but not a particularly, what shall we say, a friendly one, even though he was rather exclusive perhaps with some of his own circle.

BURG: Who would you say was your best friend at that time in the staff college?

PEARKES: Lord Gort I was very fond of. I thought a tremendous lot of him. And oh, there were several people you wouldn't know their names that--

MRS. PEARKES: Freyberg was--

PEARKES: Freyberg, I was friendly with Freyberg.

BURG: Freyberg from New Zealand.

PEARKES: From New Zealand. And a man named Ruehn; he's dead since, and Kempwelsh another man I was--he was rather a famous man. He was commandant of Sandhurst when the second war broke out.

MRS. PEARKES: Lucy Kempwelsh, I think, his sister was a great artist.

PEARKES: She was the artist.

BURG: Well, I remember this man who was at Sandhurst because some of the things I've read, the young officers who were in



training remarked on having trained while he was there.

PEARKES: Kempwelsh.

BURG: Yes, indeed. So I did run into his name that way. Now when you were finished with the staff college, you came back to Canada?

PEARKES: Came back to Canada.

BURG: What was your first posting--

PEARKES: Calgary, Alberta.

BURG: And assigned to what kind of duty, General?



PEARKES: Well, I was general staff officer, grade two, and practically all my duty was to assist the militia in training the militia and really trying to build up a militia again after the war.

BURG: Now, that city had the Calgary Highlanders?

PEARKES: The Calgary Highlanders were one unit and there was Calgary Regiment and Fifteenth Lighthorse and then the <sup>Edmonton</sup>~~Edmonton~~ unit came in this district.

BURG: I see. And all of those came under you.

PEARKES: Under my for me for training purposes.

BURG: Now how long were you there at Calgary?

PEARKES: I was there till '22 when I was transferred to Winnipeg and given a higher grade.

BURG: What was your grade?

PEARKES: GSO-1, then. It was similar duties for the province of Manitoba.

BURG: And what was your rank did you--



PEARKES: I was a major with a brevet lieutenant colonelcy. I was referred to and I wore the stars of the lieutenant colonel, but I was graded as a major. And I was posted to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. I didn't ever do any regimental duty with them because I had the staff grade and the staff pay was a little higher than regimental pay.



BURG: Now from Winnipeg, what was your next move?

PEARKES: My next move was out to Victoria where I got married. And we've been married ever since, that was in '25 although I must say that I got married before I was moved. Victoria was my wife's home. And my mother and sister were living out here at the time and I had come over on a holiday on home leave. I met my wife and then we were fortunate we were posted here for a couple of years, and then I went as second in command and senior staff officer, Royal Military College, Kingston.

BURG: I see. And this was at that time the Canadian equivalent of a West Point or a Sandhurst.



PEARKES: Yes, Canadian equivalent to West Point. I went down to West Point with the hockey team and played hockey. I didn't play of course, the cadets played hockey. And at that time the commandant's name was Snow, if that means anything to you.

BURG: I've not run into him, no, at least I don't think I have.

PEARKES: He was rather an elderly man. I've forgotten who was the superintendent of cadets, but he was a younger man.

BURG: Now, what kind of work then did you do at Kingston?

PEARKES: There was a director of training, there were one or two officers in training there, I supervised the military training. I had nothing to do with the ordinary educational training, mathematics and that sort of thing, but the straight military subjects. I lectured in military history and in addition to that I ran certain special courses for militia officers or army officers coming in, one of which was the staff college preparatory course which I ran for permanent force officers who were anxious to go to a staff college.



BURG: General, as you think back now, was the training there at Kingston, was it the kind of training they needed for World War II?

PEARKES: I think so.

BURG: Basically you think it was.

PEARKES: I think so.

BURG: Now you yourself had fought in ground combat in the first World War, was the training syllabus, it reflected that, but it also contained some forward-looking ideas too?

PEARKES: After the war there was forward-looking ideas. We trained, or attempted to train, for mobile warfare as best we could with the equipment which Canada had, which was extremely little in the way of modern equipment. Of course I kept in close touch with my friends in the British army, and we always had correspondence between the officials at corresponding rank and we got a lot of basic literature from the British army. We were doing our best to train along the lines that the British army was training for between the two wars.

BURG: So it is your feeling that you were not tied to the last war but that you were working to be prepared for whatever lay ahead?

PEARKES: Yes, I certainly think we were. It took some time to get away from the idea that horses would be required, partly because we all loved horses and partly the inability of motor

vehicles at that time to cross over difficult terrain. And we were more or less limited to roads. And one felt that we wanted some cross country vehicle, while we had some armored cars and the tanks of the first war were there. But there was a sort of a feeling that the next war would be more than mobile war and perhaps the tanks would be required. The British army hung on to the notion of horse cavalry too long, there's no question about that.

BURG: And so did we. We did it too.

PEARKES: Yes. We did here in Canada. We held on to that too long. But I made several trips to England; I took several courses. The last course that I took was in, when was it, 19--

MRS. PEARKES: '37, you mean that--

PEARKES: '27, wasn't it?

MRS. PEARKES: '37, coronation year, the whole year.

PEARKES: Yes, '37. And I was over there attending the Imperial



Defense College at that time. They were certainly forward-thinking then. I came back from there, and I was posted to command at Calgary. And I was imbued with the thought that the second war was coming and coming mighty quickly. So I was trying to do what we could to get the militia thing over but the militia had no tanks, had practically no armored cars; they had one or two machine gun carriers which were more or less for exhibit than actual training. And even in 19--the year before the war, no, we came back here in '27--

MRS. PEARKES: '37, Christmas. We were there for Christmas.

PEARKES: --'37, and war broke out in '39. In the summer of '37 the militia came in with horses, even that late. But I was able to change that the next year and they brought in vehicles and cars, anything that you could call, like a tank or armored car for what little exercises they had. But I got them away from thinking about horses.

BURG: So you did what we did. We were using trucks with signs painted on them that said, "Tank".

PEARKES: Well, trucks or even ordinary cars at times.

BURG: Just to get them accustomed to the idea of mobile action.

PEARKES: Yes, and the greater speed and moving, where there were roads, moving distances. Elementary training got them loading up into vehicles and dismounting from vehicles and infantry being transported in vehicles. The thing was to try and make people think a little more actively than in the rather stereotyped idea of--



BURG: Now by 1938 and '39 were you then a general officer?

PEARKES: I was a brigadier then.

BURG: And when the war came were you--

PEARKES: When the war came, I commanded the western Canadian Brigade of the First Division, I went over as a brigadier. We went over Christmas, '39, and in July of '40 I was promoted to be a major-general, commanding the First Canadian Division.

BURG: And was that division stationed in the United Kingdom?

PEARKES: Oh, yes. We all had gone over. I went over at the end of '39 and the rest came over during the winter of '39 - '40.

BURG: And so you have that division then in England itself?

PEARKES: Yes.

BURG: But you were not there in time, you were a little too late for the battle of France?

PEARKES: Well, I had the misfortune--I got this meningitis in England. And while I was able to command the division in England and was able to train that division, the powers that be thought that it would be unwise to send me overseas commanding the division. Which I think they were right in doing because, while I could stand and do more than the average person under reasonable living conditions, that meningitis still stayed with me. And I think that it would have been unwise, although I was bitterly disappointed. I wanted to take my division into action; I had trained them. I was very fond of the division. But looking back at it now I think the authorities were right to say that it is too much of a risk for a man who is not perhaps in the





very best of health, although he is apparently very energetic and able when he can get a night's rest nearly every night in comfortable billets and go on training even a couple of nights perhaps under maneuvering conditions where things are a good deal better than actual battle conditions. So I was sent back to Canada to take over the Pacific Command.

BURG: That runs up British Columbia, up the coast.

PEARKES: British Columbia, up the coast, and through to Alberta and the Yukon.

BURG: And this is 1940?

PEARKES: No, it was '42. I remained in England till '42. But then we were getting close to thinking of the invasion. As I say, I was very disappointed, and I probably didn't look upon it quite so kindly then as I thought. But looking back I think that they were wise. I think they were wise.

BURG: Now did you meet or work with any of the Americans who were there in 1942?

PEARKES: Yes, I worked closely with General [ John L. ] DeWitt,





and I went down to see him at San Francisco two or three times, because he had the Western Command--I've forgotten what they called it--but he was at the Presidio.

BURG: Yes, at one time called the Ninth Corps.

PEARKES: No, I didn't hear that name. But he had command of the Pacific coast, the whole of the Pacific coast, from the army point of view. And then you see he was planning the--

[Interruption]

BURG: You were telling me that he was planning the operations against Attu.

PEARKES: Attu and Kiska. And we got our heads together and thought it would be a very good idea if there was some Canadian representation made there. And eventually, well, first of all they sent half a dozen observers up to Attu from my command to see what conditions were like up there. I did that more or less on my own responsibility.

BURG: So I heard.

PEARKES: And then I eventually got permission for a brigade of Canadians to join in the attack of Kiska, which of course was a bit of a fiasco in that the Japs had moved out. But still it had all the appearance of being in operation.

BURG: Of course it did.

PEARKES: We didn't know the Japs had gone.

BURG: Now your headquarters for your Canadian command were here at Victoria.

PEARKES: Here in Victoria and Vancouver, we had moved from Victoria to Vancouver it being more central and easier too.

BURG: Let me ask you, where was Major-General Pearkes during the Kiska operation?

PEARKES: I was here in Vancouver, but I went up, I think three times, up to Alaska. I went up, first of all, to Anchorage and

talked things over with Simon Bolivar Buckner, who became a great friend of mine. I liked him.

BURG: So did my father, my father was out there too.

PEARKES: Was he at Kiska?

BURG: At Atka.

PEARKES: At Atka. Well, then I went down, having seen him there, another time I went back and made the arrangements for our troops to come in to train there under Corlett; I don't know if you remember Major-General [Charles H.] Corlett.

BURG: I know his name.

PEARKES: Well he was commanding the American forces, land forces, the army, which landed at Kiska and there he made all the plans for that. He was under Admiral Wright, was it? What was the admiral's name? I've forgotten now.

BURG: I think Wright was his name.

PEARKES: I think it was Wright. But he was commanding the

American division you see, and the Canadian Brigade was working with them. And then I went out to Kiska a couple of times--well, I went out to, what was it, Attu? Where the troops were headquartered--

BURG: Yes.

PEARKES: --to make a final arrangements and I had to agree to the plan as far as the Canadians were concerned, because the Canadian government wanted to be satisfied that the plan was a sound plan and that sort of thing. And then I went on to Kiska a couple of days after they landed and then I went back later in the winter to arrange for the Canadian troops to come back.

BURG: Was the Canadian government concerned perhaps because of Dieppe, the landings at Dieppe [Northern France], and the heavy Canadian losses there? Or do you know?



PEARKES: No, I don't think that had any particular influence on the government. I think the government was not anxious to get involved in a Pacific war at that time. I'm certain that the type of troops that they had, because these were troops which



had been trained only in Canada, many of them were not particularly anxious to go to war. You probably know the troubles that we had at that time recruiting when conscription was brought in, and conscription wasn't brought in at that time; they were all supposed to be volunteers.

BURG: And if they didn't wish to go overseas, they didn't have to.

PEARKES: If they didn't wish to go overseas, they didn't have to go, and every influence was brought to bear. In fact it was a very difficult period because you had two armies really-- you had those who were volunteers and wanted to go over to France and you had those who had been called up for home service, who were conscripted for that, who were, in many cases, quite unwilling to be a soldier or not particularly wanting to be, had a number of sons of immigrants from Europe who were living on the prairies and you had the French-Canadians. Now the sons of the immigrants were required on their farms and they didn't like being called up particularly. And the attitude of many of them, through their parents was, "Don't go overseas, why you

don't have to go, if you are needed why the government will order you to go; you don't want to be a mercenary". And they didn't know the difference between a mercenary and a volunteer; why should they? They had come from central Europe, and they had the idea that if those wars has been a European war they would be conscripted and have to serve and they'd go and fight for their country. And they were also in Europe, two or three centuries ago, well, was the professional soldier who would volunteer to go and fight anywhere -- and they were mercenaries. Well, the peasant background of the Canadian immigrant would be a mercenary, fight for your country if the government tells you to. And I had sympathy with these stories, and they had an attitude of being adopted. Before I came back, they were sort of ostracizing the lads who wouldn't volunteer and the units and called "zombies" and all sorts of names. And I came back and Japan had come into the war then, and I had to organize against the possibility, remote perhaps, but against the possibility of attacks on British Columbia, and I wanted regiments which could fight and were proud and would fight together. So I did my



best to develop regimental pride and pride in the work of defending Canada, and I objected strongly to the ones who wouldn't volunteer for overseas being sort of looked down upon. I said they were all soldiers, they were all doing their duty. If the government wants to order them overseas they can order them, but as long as they're prepared to fight, defend British Columbia, well I want them to be good soldiers; that was the attitude I took.

BURG: And did it seem to work, General?

PEARKES: It worked in this way, that the regiments from different units became happier organizations because they all worked together. Some of those who wouldn't volunteer were promoted to be NCO [Noncommissioned Officer] after that, otherwise they wouldn't promote anybody. And it was a gradual building up of regimental spirit. I suppose to a limited extent that helped to get some of them to volunteer because they were always calling on volunteers from us. It was awfully hard to build up a unit because we had to supply reinforcements to go overseas and the Canadian army was banded to a good deal of change, and those who did





volunteer were sent away pretty soon. But I'm certain it meant better training for them and they were better units, and, when the time came for them to be conscripted or ordered overseas, why they were better soldiers than they would if they had been the downcasts which they were when I came back.

BURG: How did they feel after Kiska? Now Kiska must have been quite a buildup and then a letdown when the Japanese were not there. Did the brigade's morale stay high after Kiska?

PEARKES: Yes. I think that those who went to Kiska came back and were proud of themselves for being somewhere.

BURG: I would think they would be; they had been ready to take risks.

PEARKES: They were ready to take risks. They had had a miserable time there, but at the same time they had worked with the American troops and they had got on very well with them, and they had done the job that they were supposed to do. It had been an experience for them to go and see, not a very pleasant part of the world, but another part of the world and when they came back,





why, I don't say that large numbers of them volunteered to go overseas, no, I don't think they did, some did.

BURG: But they would be a pretty valuable commodity in Canada, because here was a whole brigade that had had the experience of a very large amphibious exercise.

PEARKES: But of course the drain was put on, more reinforcements, Dieppe, casualties at Dieppe had been heavy and they wanted units to be built up, and there was always a wear and tear of the army in England. They were always calling on the Pacific Command to send reinforcements. Then Italy came along you see and there were casualties in Italy. In fact, Sicily and Kiska coincided almost in dates.

BURG: I guess that's right, that's right, they did. Now you viewed Buckner as being a very good man to work with, you liked him.

PEARKES: I liked Buckner I thought that he was a great person, great personality. I don't know that you would say that he was



very modern in training. I don't know that he'd really had a great deal of up-to-date training. He'd been in the Alaskan Command which couldn't have had a great deal of modern training.

BURG: No, it didn't.

PEARKES: He was a great man with troops. He got around and he mixed with the troops and he was liked by the troops; he was a personality. He moved around and neither heat nor cold seemed to worry him at all. And he loved Alaska.

BURG: And ultimately that willingness to be with the troops led to his death on Okinawa.

How about General DeWitt? Your experience with him--did you find him to be a pretty capable administrator?



PEARKES: I think he was a capable administrator, but I wouldn't say that he was a great commander.

BURG: That would be my impression too, and I wondered how you felt about him.

PEARKES: Again, I don't think he had any modern training. I

don't think he had been out of the United States to see the training which was going on in Europe, in England. And it struck me when I came back, having commanded a division over in England for those two years, that the troops out here, if I say so, they were well trained in the use of their weapons, but it struck me that they had no idea of maneuver.

BURG: Well, General Eisenhower was on maneuvers at Ft. Lewis in the state of Washington about 1940, and he has remarked-- about all we did was to keep falling down over logs and falling into the underbrush. It was right back to the Napoleonic wars' rifleman creeping through the brush.



PEARKES: My impression and I went down, I saw troops there and I saw something that, when I went down to visit DeWitt, I went down two or three times, and he showed me the troops and the training that was going on. My impression was that the troops were well trained in the use of their weapons, but beyond that, why I always felt that they relied upon their commanders to put them in the face of the enemy, right up to the enemy, where they could use their weapons. But to approach the enemy, they



knew nothing about minor tactics. They seemingly, knew nothing about taking cover or minor tactics, encircling and cooperating of fire from one section, and the other section advancing; there's a lot of things.

BURG: Did it remind you of 1918 where American units next to you in the line would make frontal assaults and lose heavy casualties just as though the one thing they had in mind was run across the ground as fast as possible so they could hit somebody.

PEARKES: I can't say. I never served close to the Americans in the first war.

BURG: Well, a lot of the British regimental histories, I'm struck by the number of times that they remark, "We had the such-and-such American division next to us, very brave lads who evidently never heard of a flank attack." Always just straight in.

PEARKES: No, that was what I was really saying. They were brave; if you put them there close enough to the enemy where they could use their weapons they'd give a very good account of





themselves, but they didn't know how to get close. Now whether that's a fair criticism, but I didn't see the Americans in action in World War I so I can't say about that. I didn't happen to be next to any American troops.

BURG: Well after a time I was struck by the number of occasions I've read this in the British regimental and divisional histories. It must have been typical of us, we didn't want to learn from your experiences; we just wanted to get in.

PEARKES: The British army has always been trained on having very few men against larger forces of Afridis, or whatever you got.

BURG: Plus fourteen thousand Zulus!

PEARKES: Yes, and they had to take great care of their men. I don't mean that they nursed them unnecessarily, but they had to learn to advance in the methods which, well, in those years, was more or less outdoor skirmishings, if you like, handed down from the casualties of the Boer War. The Boer War taught



the British army minor maneuvering.

BURG: And musketry.

PEARKES: Musketry, but how to get to a place where you could use your musket. And that seemed to me to be one of the things the American army hadn't quite grasped.

BURG: Did you come to have a different impression by 1945 from reading the accounts?

PEARKES: Well, 1945, that was the end of the war. Well you see after Kiska I didn't see anything much of the American army. I think I went down once to San Francisco; there was some conference which DeWitt called. There was a Mexican commander from the west coast that came to it, myself, and I think it was just a little get-together to know each other more than anything. But I didn't see any until the Korean War broke out, and then I went down to Ft. Lewis because I was a member of Parliament then and I got permission to go down and see the troops at Ft. Lewis who were training to go to Kiska.



BURG: To Korea. These were Canadian troops training down there.

PEARKES: Korea. These were Canadian troops. Many of the regiments had been regiments in my division so I was anxious to go and see them again. I knew most of the officers.

BURG: Didn't the Princess Pats go over?

PEARKES: Oh, yes.

BURG: They were one of the units if I remember correctly.

PEARKES: Yes, they went.

BURG: Now you say you were in Parliament, General. Was your constituency in British Columbia?

PEARKES: Oh, yes, it was on this island. I'm living in the constituency. When the war came we bought this house so that I'd live in, be living in my constituency which at that time was named <sup>Nanaimo</sup> ~~Nanimo~~.



BURG: The <sup>Nanaimo</sup>~~Nanimo~~ riding?

PEARKES: The <sup>Nanaimo</sup>~~Nanimo~~ riding. But since then it was cut in half. I won the seat in the <sup>Nanaimo</sup>~~Nanimo~~ riding and for two years I represented, two sessions, I represented <sup>Nanaimo</sup>~~Nanimo~~ and then it was cut in half and it became Esquimalt-<sup>Saanich</sup>~~Sanich~~.

BURG: When had you won your seat for the first time, what year was that?

PEARKES: The year the war ended, '45.

BURG: So you and Mr. Fulton must have gone into Parliament--

PEARKES: Davie Fulton joined at the same time.

BURG:-- And you're both Conservatives....

PEARKES: Both Conservatives.



BURG: And then you stayed active in politics from--

PEARKES: Until I became lieutenant governor of this province; that was in '60.



BURG: Now, going back a bit, were you a member of Mr. [John] Diefenbaker's government from 1957?

PEARKES: Yes.

BURG: Now your portfolio was minister of defense starting in 1957?

PEARKES: Yes, starting in 1957.

BURG: May I ask you, General, when you took that portfolio, what would you say were the major problems that confronted you as minister of defense?



PEARKES: Well, the major problem I think was the defense of the North American continent. Now I say that because I always contend that the defense of America, the defense of the USA were indivisible and I was very keen to hit the--well, I signed the treaty, the NORAD [North American Air Defense]. That meant building up--of course we were fearful of the Russians in those days, and it was a period of time when the American commanders felt that Russia had an edge over them. You recall

the talk of the missile gap and that sort of thing. I was enthusiastic about NORAD. Plans were being made before we took over the NORAD agreement, but they, the Liberal Government of Canada, had never signed it. It hadn't been signed nor hadn't been finalized; at the time there seemed to be some hesitancy about it. But the Americans were anxious to get this going because they were drawing up their defense plans, anti-aircraft, aircraft stationing in Canada and they wanted this thing settled and agreed upon. And it seemed to me to be sound politics, and I couldn't see any argument about loss of sovereignty and that sort of thing which was raised so frequently. And which the [Louis Stephen] St. Laurent government apparently had been rather afraid of. They wanted to sign it, but they hadn't got the courage to do it. Well, I suppose with the "valour of ignorance" I went in--. I was very friendly with Diefenbaker and he trusted me then I think, we, between the two of us, we put it through cabinet very quickly, perhaps a little too quickly in the long run. But I still maintain that there was a good deal of fear that Russia might do something and it takes a long time to get a defense system with proper anti-aircraft, proper aircraft,



landing fields, more airstrips worked up, and I thought the sooner we got it signed the better.

BURG: Because you had been in England at the time when they too had to put together a hasty defense system.

PEARKES: Yes, I had seen that and I was anxious. It didn't occur to me that there would be very much opposition to it, but there was opposition.

BURG: Was it basically from the Liberal party, or was there some Conservative opposition too?

PEARKES: There was Conservative opposition; there was cabinet opposition. Howard Green for instance wasn't particularly in favor--he may have told you that.

BURG: I understood that Howard Green took a pretty dim view of NORAD.

PEARKES: He took a pretty dim view. Well, I've always been friendly and still am friendly with Howard Green. He was a



thorn in my side because he became, you see, foreign secretary, and he had a good deal of influence, and there were others. But I always feel it was one of the more satisfactory achievements that I had that I got that treaty signed.

BURG: Well, I thought Howard Green was probably the thorn for you. Who besides Mr. Diefenbaker offered you your greatest support?

PEARKES: One or two of the cabinet ministers who had seen service in World War II and Doug [Douglas S.] Harkness, of course he'd been in my division, he'd been an artillery commander in my division. He was minister of agriculture--

[Interruption]



BURG: George, I didn't get, what was George's last name.

PEARKES: Hees, George Hees, he's still a member.

BURG: And he had been in your division too.

PEARKES: He had been in my division.



BURG: You had that place packed with your own men. And [Edmund D.] Davie Fulton had been with the Seaforths in Italy.

PEARKES: The Seaforths were in my division. Davie Fulton had been a learner on divisional staff at one time.

BURG: Another man, oh, boy, oh, boy! Now the difference was Howard Green had been in France in the first world war, but not in the second.

PEARKES: Yes, not in the second. He had never been out of Canada between the two wars. Now I have a great respect for Howard Green. He's been a cabinet minister, well, he's been a member of Parliament. Matter of fact, he was responsible for getting me to go into Parliament to a very large extent.

BURG: Oh, I hadn't known that.

PEARKES: Oh, yes.

BURG: He encouraged you to think about doing this.

PEARKES: Well, he was a senior B.C. member of Parliament, and I had thought of going into Parliament before the war came and



I went and saw him.

BURG: Now could I ask you this, General, as you worked with NORAD and you got the agreement signed, who were you working with on our side of the border? Do you remember any of those people?

PEARKES: Well, what was the minister, your foreign secretary was a big man.

BURG: It was probably, if it wasn't Dulles, it would have been Christian Herter.

PEARKES: Christian Herter. And McCready Neil H. McElroy? was it?

BURG: Yes.



PEARKES: Who was army or defense. And then there was a little man; he's dead now, Donald A. Quarles, some such name as that, who was correspondent to our deputy ministers; I think he was a permanent under-secretary of defense.

BURG: I'll have to check his name out. I think I know the man you mean.

PEARKES: I think it was Quarles.

BURG: Q-u-a-r-l-e-s.

PEARKES: Something like that.

BURG: All right, he will be easy to chase down.

PEARKES: He's dead, I'm afraid now.

BURG: Yes, I think you're right, but I'll be able to find out some biographical information about him. Did you have personal meetings with Mr. Herter?



PEARKES: Yes, I went down several times and worked with him and then even after the treaty was signed, well, he signed the treaty.

BURG: Mr. Herter did?

PEARKES: With me. I think we were the two who signed. And then during the time when we were cooperating, the two countries

were working closely together in those days closer than I think they've ever worked before. Of course we had these joint meetings, of course the staff has always been close together but Parliaments hadn't, and we had a group of cabinet ministers: finance, external affairs and defense. And on your side there was secretary of state, defense, and your treasury man. I've forgotten what his name was.

[Robert Anderson]

BURG: Humphrey.



PEARKES: No. I'm really talking about the period just after the treaty had been signed when we had this group of three or four cabinet ministers from each side and we met once down at--we met twice a year, once in the United States and once in Canada.



BURG: Now meetings would go on for, say, a day?

PEARKES: A day or two days perhaps.

BURG: Now did you meet President Eisenhower during that period of time?

PEARKES: Yes.

BURG: Did you have a chance to talk with him?

PEARKES: Yes, I had luncheon at the White House; I had met him before. The first time that I had met General Eisenhower was when the Canadian troops first went to Europe after the war when NATO---. And he met the Canadian brigade when they landed at Antwerp, Antwerp or Rotterdam, I forget. Rotterdam I think it was.



BURG: And you were with them?

PEARKES: Well, I was in Europe at the time representing the opposition of the Canadian government on the Council of Europe. The Canadian troops were coming, and I obtained permission to

go and see them arrive, and I went up from Paris.

BURG: And General Eisenhower was there to--

PEARKES: And General Eisenhower was there and met General Eisenhower and had talks.

BURG: How did he impress you on that first meeting?

PEARKES: I was always impressed by General Eisenhower. It struck me that he was a strong man, and I thought he was a good soldier. He gave me the impression that he was a good soldier. He talked as though he knew soldiering.

BURG: And then you saw him again while you were a member of Parliament.

PEARKES: When I was a minister I saw him, and then he came up to Canada, he came to Ottawa. I saw him when he was in Ottawa; I was still a minister. We talked then and we were talking about NORAD in those days, NORAD and NATO because there was an element among Canadians who were anxious to withdraw the troops from Europe. And the American, General Norstad--



BURG: Yes. Lauris Norstad.

PEARKES: Yes, I met him several times, and he was most anxious that we didn't withdraw any Canadian troops.

BURG: And your feeling was that they should not be withdrawn?

PEARKES: My personal feeling was that we should use more technical troops and fewer infantry. I felt that there was a host of infantrymen in Germany and so forth and that it was expensive for us to keep large numbers of infantry there where we could have done better if we instead of having, what was it we had, a brigade of infantry, we should have had more technical troops and fewer infantry. Because I felt that you could have the infantrymen; there was at that time plenty of young men in France, Germany and Belgium who could have done that without continually moving troops back and forth. So if we could have supplied more technical troops, we'd have been making a better contribution and at less expense.

BURG: You would just have changed the mix a little bit.



Instead of this many technical and this much infantry you'd have shortened up and increased this a bit and gotten more equivalent value.

PEARKES: Yes. I would have kept the infantry units under strength, and they could easily be reinforced.

BURG: So you would have cadre units there which could be fleshed out in case of difficulty.

PEARKES: Yes. That was my idea.

BURG: Yes, I see.

PEARKES: But when I became minister I did send a few more technical troops over. We increased our signals; we sent armor over; they'd had no armor before and I got some.



BURG: Did you ever confer with President Eisenhower about that sort of thing?


PEARKES: No. But I talked to Norstad frequently about it.



But I can't say that I ever got--we didn't quite get to that stage. Oh, I may have casually mentioned it, but he was always pretty busy when he came up to Canada and it was not a case of being able to sit down and have a talk alone with him; I never got to that stage.

BURG: Did it seem to you, General, that the things that Mr. Eisenhower was asking Canada for, did these things generally seem reasonable to you?

PEARKES: Well, if you say that there was a request made by the American commanders for the things that Canada should do to help in the mutual defense of Canada, yes.

BURG: Those things were reasonable... 

PEARKES: I think it was a reasonable defense system that we built up then.

BURG: Both of us together?

PEARKES: Both of us together. The very generous Americans

accepted our people on staff in the various commands and that sort of thing. At NATO we sent the second in commander there, which was more than generous.

BURG: So in that respect our two countries seemed to be carrying on the wartime cooperation among the allies with Canadians serving in responsible positions and Americans also sharing in these positions.

PEARKES: Yes, that's right.

BURG: Now with regard to the Cuban missile crisis--now there we passed beyond Mr. Eisenhower's administration--but I do understand that in Canada our position with Cuba was not always highly regarded.

PEARKES: In Cuba?

BURG: Yes.

PEARKES: I was out of the government then.

BURG: Oh, you came out just before that?



PEARKES: Just before Cuba.

BURG: And that's when you came out here to British Columbia?

PEARKES: I came out here to be lieutenant governor.

BURG: I had forgotten, of course. All right, I withdraw that question because you were coming out here for a new job.

PEARKES: Yes.

BURG: Now how long did you hold that position?

PEARKES: Almost eight years.

BURG: And that's longer than is the usual.

PEARKES: That's the longest that's ever been....



BURG: Yes. And you were very highly regarded, both you--

PEARKES: I got along very well with them.

BURG: --you and Mrs. Pearkes both?

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PEARKES: Yes, my wife was a great help. But then we decided it was time to retire and that sort of thing. Now I've got a man helping me build a fence--

BURG: You have just done it all, General. Thank you so much.

