

# Pearkes Discusses the Bomarcs

The following is George Pearkes' interpretation of events as expressed in an interview by Dr. Reginald Roy - April 5, 1967.  
(ACC 74-1 Box 5 Interview #61).

**P:** I have to confess rather reluctantly we went into the Bomarcs...we had to give something...we had to say there was some defence. To have been really firm I could have said well, there's not going to be any bomber attack, it's all going to be ICBMs therefore we don't need any defence against any bombers because there's not going to be any. We won't even spend money on Bomarcs. But against that, people said well, at the present time they haven't got enough ICBMs to gain a complete decision - the ICBM attack is likely to be followed by a bomber attack, therefore, we should have some defences and the Bomarcs are part of a chain of Bomarcs which can be all across North America. And that was the original plan - all across the North American Continent. All from British Columbia, near Seattle, right across...along practically the frontier between Canada and the United States. And because the frontier swung down a bit round Ontario, and because of the importance of our Montreal and Toronto areas, they were going to have the two Canadian stations in that area to have special protection of Bomarcs across the Continent. Then for one reason or another, mainly because they were thinking more of ICBMs and also because they were bringing in other things like the Nike Zeus, that equipment was emerging, and they were having launching pads so that they could be put on trains to be moved about, and the gap was beginning to be closed (on paper anyway) and the Americans gave up the Bomarc stations in the west so that there was not this continuous belt, but they kept the Bomarc stations - Bomarc B- in and around the eastern states.

**R:** Am I correct in thinking that insofar as the Bomarc sites in Ontario-Quebec area are concerned, that these were offered as a gift to Canada. In other words that the...

**P:** The Bomarcs were.

**R:** Canadians didn't buy them or anything of this nature. This was really a part of the American defence....

**P:** It was practically a gift. We had to put money in - I've forgotten whether we had to prepare the site - but the equipment was a gift, was practically a gift. We got it for practically nothing....

...

**P:** ...As soon as NORAD was approved, then the Americans came forward with a plan for the defence of the North American Continent which included all these different agencies - the fighters, the warning systems, the Bomarcs, and...there was a map which showed where all these stations were going to be.

**R:** In brief then, the two problems...[were] going along at the same time; the problem of NORAD, the problem of whether or not to continue on the CF-105 and so on.

**P:** Yes. Well, the NORAD plan came first...the original NORAD plan included the fighter

squadrons of the Arrow. They didn't lay down the type of aircraft, but they said Canadian fighter squadrons...Of course, the Arrow never did come into production. There were only three of them and there were a total of seven in various stages which were being built. They would never have been used as part of squadron equipment - those seven experimental ones....

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## Post-War Politics 1946-1984

### Federal Politics

After leaving military service, Pearkes decided to go into politics, partly out of a desire to assist war veterans. In June 1945 he won his first federal election, representing the Nanaimo riding, which at that time included Saanich, Esquimalt and the Gulf Islands. He became the Conservative party's Defence Critic, and over the next twelve years made speeches in the House of Commons criticizing the Liberal Government's defence policies and stressing the need for the armed forces in Canada to become more efficient and integrated.

### CONTROVERSIAL DECISIONS

In 1957 the Progressive Conservatives won the federal election, and Prime Minister John Diefenbaker appointed him Minister of National Defence. Click on the image to read the telegram Diefenbaker sent on February 28th congratulating his new cabinet member. (ACC 74-1 Box 10.6) Image size 36KB



As Defence Minister, Pearkes faced one of his first crises, the cancellation of the Avro Arrow interceptor aircraft. Pearkes also helped approve the proposed agreement for the North Atlantic Air Defence Command (NORAD), which he considered to be one of the highlights of his political career. Throughout these years in Ottawa Blytha Pearkes was also busy; she was active in the Wives of Progressive Conservative Members and Senators, and helped her husband in his election campaigns.

In 1959 and 1960, Pearkes devised a policy for Canada to acquire nuclear warheads such as carried by the Bomarc and Lacrosse missiles. He thereby clashed with Howard Green, Secretary of State for External Affairs, who did not want to see Canada become an atomic power. Pearkes also found that Prime Minister Diefenbaker seemed uninterested in military matters, and as Green exerted pressure on Diefenbaker, the Prime Minister became more reluctant to commit to Pearkes' policy. George Pearkes later said in a 1967 interview, "I stood firm, and I still stand firm, that the defence of this Continent is indivisible between Canada and the United States...it's one thing."

(Interview #61, April 5 1967 ACC 74-1 Box 6)

Eventually, Pearkes decided to retire from federal politics and accept an offer to become the next Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. In October 1960 Pearkes was sworn in, and he and Blytha moved into Government House in Victoria.

To read transcriptions of George Pearkes describing the Bomarc system, click [here](#).



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