

Canadians in the North Pacific, 1943: Major-General Pearkes and the Kiska Operation

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When Major-General G. R. Pearkes became G.O.C.-in-C. Pacific Command in September 1942, he was of necessity concerned primarily with the means of defending the province from Japanese attacks. It was not long, however, before he began to think of the offensive. The nearest Japanese forces were on Attu and Kiska, and obviously if they were dislodged the threat to British Columbia would be greatly reduced. These islands, however, belonged to the United States, and even if they had been Canadian there were insufficient Canadian naval forces available at the Esquimalt naval base either to transport assault troops over the 2,000-mile sea voyage or provide both the protection and bombardment necessary to effect a successful landing. The initiative to dislodge the Japanese must come from the Americans, but the initiative for Canadian participation was to come from Pearkes.

On October 10, 1942 accompanied by the United States liaison officer attached to his Headquarters, Pearkes left for a visit to Lieutenant-General John L. DeWitt, the Commanding General of the United States Fourth Army and the Western Defense Command at San Francisco. Pearkes had a strong desire to establish personal relations with DeWitt. He commanded the American forces both to the north and south of Pearkes' Command, and since Pearl Harbour the Canadian and American governments had been co-operating in a number of joint enterprises to strengthen their military effort. In Pacific Command, for example, the 1,671-mile Alaska Highway was being pushed to completion under the direction of the U.S. Army Engineers at a cost of \$138,000,000. In Prince Rupert the population had almost tripled as a result of the "invasion" of American military forces using the port as a base for reinforcing and supplying its troops both in Alaska and the South Pacific. Here, too, Canadian and American troops worked jointly on completing a road up the Skeena Valley. Coastal defence artillery batteries on both sides of the border co-operated to control the entrance into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and in a variety of other ways there was a considerable amount of joint effort and planning between

the two Commands.¹ In San Francisco Pearkes was met with a guard of honour and, as he related later,

... spent a very informative, interesting two days down there. General DeWitt was an elderly man, small and wiry in structure, had a very keen brain [and was] obviously an excellent administrator. I don't think he'd ever had any command in operations ... but he was a very hard worker. I recall going to have lunch with him in his office which consisted of apple pie, ice cream and coffee. ... I wanted to find out all I could about the [American] defences ... and I gave him all the information we had.²

Pearkes and DeWitt became warm friends and during the winter of 1942-43 kept in touch by telephone.

On April 13, 1943 DeWitt visited Pearkes in Vancouver, and informed him that he had received permission the previous month to attack Attu. The assault was planned for mid-May. He also mentioned the possibility of an attack on Kiska later in the year. Both men had talked about the steps which might be taken to dislodge the Japanese in the Aleutians in October 1942 when they had first met, some five months before DeWitt had received authority to undertake the operation. Pearkes was interested then, and was more interested now that the Americans were planning on action. He discussed with DeWitt the possibility of Canadian participation later in the year when, if all went well, Kiska would be attacked. The American general welcomed the idea, and promised full co-operation when the time should be ripe.³ Meanwhile, Pearkes, looking to the future, asked whether it would be possible to send a small group of Canadian officers with the Americans to act as observers. Once again DeWitt heartily agreed to the suggestion which Pearkes was quick to follow up. Pearkes reported to Lieutenant-General K. Stuart, the Chief of the General Staff, on his talk with DeWitt about the forthcoming attack on Attu, but he did not say anything about their private discussion regarding Canadian participation at Kiska. At this point Pearkes and DeWitt felt that an approach from the American side through military channels to feel out the Canadian authorities might bear more fruit.

About a fortnight later, on May 10, Lieutenant-General Stuart received a wire from Major-General Maurice Pope in Washington saying that

¹ See S. W. Dzuiban, *United States Military Collaboration with Canada in World War II*, Washington, Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1954, for a detailed study of Canadian-American co-operation in this area.

² Interview with Major-General G. R. Pearkes, August 12, 1966, pp. 9-10. Type-script copies of these interviews are in the possession of the author.

³ Public Archives of Canada, R.G. 24, Vol. 2921, File HQS 9055-1, Vol. 5, Letter, Pearkes to Stuart, July 24, 1943.

Mr. J. D. Hickerson, Secretary of the American section of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence, "... had suggested to him that it would be eminently appropriate if Canadian forces co-operated in removing the existing threat in the Aleutians."⁴ On the following day Stuart wired Pearkes and asked whether it was "too late to consider some form of army participation." The bread cast upon the American waters by Pearkes was returning. Stuart's enquiry, unknown to him, came on the same day that the Americans attacked Attu, an assault which was not made public for several days. Pearkes told him about his private conversations with DeWitt and about the enthusiasm of the American commander for Canadian co-operation later in the year. Stuart, too, favoured the idea. He had been advocating for some time the necessity of giving Canadian troops battle experience. He believed, too, that the N.R.M.A. soldiers would perform well in battle and, moreover, if they took part in a campaign which would help remove the Japanese threat to Canada, it would reduce the growing prejudice against them.⁵

Stuart, as Chief of the General Staff, immediately began to press directly and indirectly for Canadian participation in the Kiska campaign both in Ottawa and, through Major-General Pope, in Washington. Pope was instructed to see General G. C. Marshall, the American Chief of Staff, and put to him Stuart's enquiries regarding Canadian participation. Marshall promised to relay the message to DeWitt, and on May 24 Marshall informed him that DeWitt had expressed delight at the prospect of having Canadians participate in the campaign. Marshall added that he had authorized General DeWitt to confer with Pearkes and work out the necessary plans.⁶ It was not until two days later, on May 26, at a meeting of the Canadian War Committee that Mr. Mackenzie King was informed of the proposed inclusion of a Canadian force against Kiska. The proposal had Stuart's strong recommendation, naturally, but Mr. King was rather irritated that the idea had been initiated by the military authorities and routed through American channels. He felt that, basically, the idea was a good one but was quick to ask whether the planned action would make it any more difficult to get reinforcements for overseas. Stuart assured him it would not. The Prime Minister, once he arranged that the whole matter

⁴ Colonel C. P. Stacey, *Six Years of War, the Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific*, Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1955, p. 497. See also Dzuiban, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

⁵ See J. W. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, Vol. I, University of Toronto Press, 1960, p. 494.

⁶ Lieutenant-General M. A. Pope, *Soldiers and Politicians*, University of Toronto Press, 1962, pp. 214-216. Pope at this time was Chairman of the Canadian Joint Staff Mission in Washington.

was placed on a ministerial level, agreed that Canada should participate in the campaign,⁷ although his annoyance at the way things had been handled was only slightly mollified.

Three days before the War Cabinet met, Pearkes wired Stuart that DeWitt proposed visiting Vancouver and asked if permission could be granted for official talks with him regarding Canadian participation in the Aleutians. Provided no commitments were made, Stuart agreed. DeWitt proposed that Canadian participation might take two forms. One would be an infantry battalion and an anti-aircraft battery for garrison duties at Amchitka which would strengthen the counter-offensive potential for the American forces already there and, second, the provision of approximately a brigade group to be employed with the American task force in the capture of Kiska later in the summer. After the meeting Pearkes immediately wired Lieutenant-General Stuart indicating that the requisite force could be found within his command and requesting permission to proceed. DeWitt at the same time informed his superiors in Washington who agreed to his first suggestion subject to Canadian approval and submitted the second to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. As we have seen, the Canadian War Cabinet met on the next two days to discuss the matter, but it was a week before Pearkes received authority to act. Since DeWitt had wanted the force for Amchitka to be ready by June 15, the delay had cancelled any hope to provide assistance for the Americans on that island, and in any event Ottawa rejected the suggestion. Ottawa did approve a brigade group for the attack on Kiska, however. With only six weeks available before its embarkation, there was much to be done.⁸

Pearkes, as might be imagined, was in his element. His duty called upon him to plan and prepare for the defence of the Pacific Coast, but what better way could this be done than attack the Japanese base closest to Canada. Moreover, if this were eliminated, a glance at the map showed that the shortest route to the heartland of Japan lay along the Aleutian chain of islands. Already he was beginning to think in terms of bases on these islands which could be used to attack Japan from the north, views which were shared with DeWitt. The American interest in the Pacific was taken for granted, but was not Canada also a Pacific power, even though her strength was much less? And if so, should Canada not take such opportunities as offered themselves to participate in the Allied effort in the Pacific? Pearkes certainly thought she should. Kiska originally was an immediate goal to Pearkes, but as time went on he began to look at it as

⁷ Pickersgill, *op. cit.*, pp. 516-517.

⁸ P.A.C., R.G. 24, Vol. 2921, *op. cit.*, "Report on Operation Greenlight."

only a first step. Perhaps this was in the back of his mind when he gave the codename "Greenlight" to the special training for the operation.

When Pearkes received permission to proceed with the formation of a brigade group at noon on June 3, he immediately called Major-General H. N. Ganong to tell him that the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the 24th Field Company, R.C.E. — both units in his 8th Division — had been selected for special training.⁹ He had already telephoned Major-General A. E. Potts in Victoria asking him to report immediately. The 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade of Potts' division was to be used as it was the senior brigade in the Command. The units were selected by Ganong and Potts on the basis of their strength and efficiency. Each was recommended as "well enough trained for combined operations provided a period of intensive training was authorized." Pearkes was very careful in this respect. A year and a half previously the Canadians sent to Hong Kong were neither sufficiently experienced nor trained to cope with the task given to them. If the Japanese defending Kiska fought as hard as those on Attu, those in the attacking force would have to know their business. Moreover, it was necessary to bring the units up to strength immediately. The Canadian Fusiliers, the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Rocky Mountain Rangers had all contributed drafts for overseas service from among their volunteers. Further withdrawals for this or any other reason were forbidden and other units in the division were tapped for men to make up such deficiencies in manpower as existed. Pearkes also informed his officers that those units occupying the Nanaimo Military Camp must be moved out immediately to make way for the 13th Brigade which would start their training for Operation "Greenlight." At the meeting he held with his staff and senior officers on the morning of June 4, Pearkes stressed the need to start intensive training as soon as possible. The brigade was to concentrate immediately, and the staff was told to examine closely the information coming in from the Canadian observers in Alaska as well as from the conversations held with American staff officers whom General DeWitt had sent to assist the Canadian planners.¹⁰

Two days later Pearkes flew to Ottawa to meet with the Chief of the General Staff and his senior officers. Here the entire plan of the operation was discussed and several decisions taken. Brigadier D. R. Sargent had been recommended by Pearkes to command the force but Stuart, while

⁹ Both had been selected originally for the Amchitka force. There were two divisions in Pearkes' Command at this time — the 8th Division commanded by Ganong and the 6th Division commanded by Major-General A. E. Potts.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*; W.D., H.Q., 13th Cdn. Inf. Bde., July 1943, Appendix 15: "Memorandum of meeting held . . . at 1100 hours, June 4th, 1943, H.Q. Pacific Command."

not doubting Sargent's ability, agreed with Pearkes that his low medical category had to be considered. As a result Lieutenant-General A. G. L. McNaughton, G.O.C.-in-C., First Canadian Army, was asked for recommendations. He suggested Brigadier H. W. Foster. Pearkes knew him well both as an officer in the Lord Strathcona's Horse in pre-war years and later as a senior officer in the 1st Division. He welcomed this appointment and was pleased that Major W. S. Murdoch, who had also served on his staff overseas, was to be appointed Brigade Major.

Pearkes pointed out that the American equivalent of a brigade group included a far larger number of engineers and pioneers. These men were needed especially to land supplies on the beach and move them forward. Since the battalions in the brigade represented British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario, Pearkes suggested using Le Regiment de Hull from Quebec. Stuart agreed. "It was a wise decision to take," Pearkes said later. "When they [Le Regiment de Hull] were in Kiska they were the life and soul of the whole party during the period of occupation."¹¹ To strengthen security, a press release stated that two brigades from Pacific Command would be engaged in special training, one at Wainwright, Alberta and the other at Nanaimo, B.C. Troops were sent to Wainwright to give weight to the cover story, and the 13th Brigade assembled at Nanaimo which was only a short distance from Courtenay. A combined operations training school had been established at Courtenay which worked closely with the air force station at Comox and a naval establishment nearby. Here the battalions in the brigade alternated between "battle drill" training with live ammunition and practising the various drills and manoeuvres associated with an assault from the sea. Transportation of the brigade group, of course, would be provided by the Americans, and it was also decided that certain items of American equipment would be used. Some items were named, and Pearkes was given the choice of other articles. Brigadier Sherwood Lett, an old friend of Pearkes who had recently returned from England after being wounded at Dieppe, was appointed liaison officer between Vancouver and Ottawa and, at the same time, to lend his assistance to the planning staff.

Pearkes flew back to Vancouver on June 8 highly pleased with the conference in Ottawa, but on the day he returned he received a telegram from General DeWitt. Up to this moment it was understood that the brigade would not leave Nanaimo until August 1 which would permit it to have at least six weeks' training after its concentration. DeWitt now

¹¹ Interview with Major-General G. R. Pearkes, August 12, 1966, p. 20.

requested that the training and equipping of the force be completed by July 15. Among other things this meant that the men recently drafted into the 13th Brigade would have less opportunity to become acquainted with their N.C.O.s and officers and that everyone, especially those in the field artillery and the infantry mortar platoons, would have less time to practise with the new American weapons with which they were to be issued. However this could be overcome in part by making every hour count. Pearkes was in Vancouver only two days before he flew to San Francisco to see DeWitt. There were a number of decisions to be made and action taken on them immediately — American weapons, certain items of American dress and equipment, the loading of both troops and equipment, and a variety of administrative problems ranging from rations to the payment of the troops in U.S. funds. Pearkes also had a long talk with Major-General C. M. Corlett who was to command the entire Task Force.¹² As a result of his discussions with Corlett, it was decided to modify the organization of the Canadian brigade to give more independence and self-sufficiency to the Canadian battalions or “combat teams” as they were to be named. Pearkes got on well with Corlett. They were almost the same age, and while Pearkes was in the Yukon before the Great War, Corlett was serving as a second lieutenant in Alaska. The Canadian brigade was to come under his command at Kiska, and Brigadier Foster was to have the same high opinion of this Nebraskan as Pearkes. After discussing the general operations plan of attack with Corlett and DeWitt, and following a side trip to San Diego where he observed the American troops training in combined operations, Pearkes returned to Vancouver on June 14 with Brigadier W. N. Bostock who had accompanied him on the trip.

The day after Pearkes arrived he assembled his staff, briefed them on the changes to be made, informed them about the decisions made regarding weapons and equipment, and brought them up to date on administrative matters. To Brigadier Lett and one or two others he gave the outline of the operational plan. Unit censorship on the “Greenlight” forces was imposed immediately, and he also gave orders that the battalions or “combat teams” at Nanaimo should live, eat and train together. This would bring the engineers, medical staff, artillery and other arms supporting the infantry into a closer combination. Since they were going to fight

¹² Admiral T. C. Kinkaid was in overall charge of the operation. It was he who ordered DeWitt to advance the date of the assault owing partly to the need to release some of his naval force for other operations in the Pacific by a specific date, and partly to his desire to take even greater advantage of weather conditions in the Aleutians.

as a team, the sooner they became familiar with each others' methods the better it would be. He also told them that Brigadier Foster would be arriving in a few days to take over command of the Canadian invasion forces, and that the Chief of the General Staff was expected shortly to observe the progress of their training.

Two days later Pearkes was airborne again, this time heading north to visit Lieutenant-General S. B. Buckner, Jr. at his headquarters in Anchorage and to visit Adak where both the American and Canadian forces would carry out final training in a climate similar to Kiska. Buckner and Pearkes quickly struck up a warm friendship. Buckner was a few years older and had been commissioned in 1908. The son of a lieutenant-general in the Confederate Army, he was a regular army man whose most recent position was Commanding General of the Alaska Defence Force. "He was a most delightful man," Pearkes recalled. "He loved Alaska, he was a great fisherman, a great hunter, and he had travelled all around the Aleutian chain and continental Alaska."¹³ As usual Pearkes gained as much information from Buckner as he could about training facilities, the type of climatic conditions the Canadians could expect if they remained in Kiska for some months, and so forth. He was given the latest intelligence available on the Japanese, gleaned primarily from air force squadrons bombing the island. Despite the blockade of Kiska by American naval forces and the bombing it received by both American and Canadian squadrons, it was felt that the Japanese garrison of an estimated 11,000 men would put up a desperate struggle as they had at Attu. At Anchorage as in San Francisco, Pearkes was struck by the whole-hearted co-operation given by the Americans to himself and his staff. Aerial photographs, maps, officers familiar with Japanese methods, weapons experts, mechanical transport, indeed every facility the Canadians requested were given in full measure even to the provision of Japanese interpreters.

When Pearkes arrived back in Vancouver on June 22 he met Brigadier Foster, who had arrived five days earlier, as well as Lieutenant-General Stuart who had come west to observe the state of readiness of "Greenlight Force," as the 13th Brigade was termed. Stuart seemed pleased with his inspection of the brigade and the training they were getting. Pearkes brought him up to date on the information he had and drafted an official letter stating his own satisfaction with the Force as well as an outline of the plan of operations.

In the previous two weeks Pearkes had travelled to Ottawa, San Francisco and Anchorage co-ordinating the numerous preparations for the

¹³ Pearkes interview, *op. cit.*, September 9, 1966, p. 6.

dispatch of the 13th Brigade and personally checking the plans for the dispatch and eventual commitment of the brigade to Kiska. On his return he maintained a keen interest in the training and equipping of the men. When Lieutenant-General DeWitt and his staff arrived in Vancouver on July 5, Pearkes took them over to Nanaimo to observe the training of the brigade. "The Americans," he stated,

... were extremely pleased with our Canadian troops. [DeWitt] was very impressed by their smartness and their manner of marching. . . . These troops were physically fit and well trained. They had had pretty rigorous training in preparation for this operation and I had some good regimental commanders who put their heart and soul into it. . . .¹⁴

DeWitt was able to see the men wearing the mixture of Canadian-American equipment which had recently been issued to them. Both senior officers, after talking to the officers and men, would have agreed with the brigade war diarist when he claimed that the "morale of the troops is high and all are anxious to get on the move."¹⁵

It was cold and dark on the morning of July 12 when the 13th Brigade formed up on the parade square. The men, laden down with a 60-pound rucksack besides their weapons, began to march to the wharves where American ships which had been loaded the previous day were waiting to embark them. Somewhat to their surprise when they reached the dock they saw Major-General Pearkes there with his senior staff officers to wish them good luck. Later that day the ships moved off to rendezvous south of Discovery Island before sailing in convoy towards the north. It was not until the following day that Brigadier Foster informed all officers of their first destination and final objective. The type of training they were carrying out, the censorship of mail, the tight security measures taken around the wharves during embarkation, and the fact that there was only one Japanese base on the North American continent had led many to make an intelligent guess, however, but no word leaked to the newspapers. The timing of the assault would be of the greatest value to enemy intelligence, and from their isolation at Adak it would be extremely difficult for any word to leak out.

After seven days at sea, the Canadians reached Adak on the evening of July 20. Having come so far north, most of the men, as the war diarist noted,

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁵ W.D., H.Q., 13th Cdn. Inf. Bde., July 7, 1943. DeWitt arranged to provide four hundred .30 calibre carbines for the use of officers and stretcher bearers in the brigade.

... expected a bare, rocky country with a little coarse grass in the lowland near the shoreline. Everybody gasped as the low mists parted now and then to reveal beautifully verdant hills [and] rocky valleys in which all rocks seemed to be moss covered, but the mists closed in and we turned our thoughts to the harbour itself. Adak harbour was like the roads of Southampton Water. Ship after ship lay at anchor [of] all types and description; not to forget the little tugboat that steered us past the final opening in the submarine boom and laid us alongside a wooden jetty.¹⁶

For the next three weeks the battalions made the best use of time available for training. They became thoroughly familiar with their weapons and had several major rehearsals in combined operations by "attacking" Great Sitkin Island which was nearby. They found, too, that Adak might have looked like a jewel from the sea but to live there was something else again. "The air is like a Scottish mist, the ground like a quagmire," the war diarist wrote at the beginning of August, and a week later he experienced something of what was to come:

Tonight the wind rose to 40 miles per hour. The rain was torrential, roads washed out, our small vehicle park (we have only five vehicles) melted into the side of a coal dump and small rivers ran through tents; in some places it required a considerable effort to lift our feet after standing in one spot for a couple of minutes.¹⁷

No matter what the weather, the training went on. The more the men worked together the greater their confidence grew in each other, and as there were a large number who had recently been drafted to the battalions, this was an important factor as was the improvement of their efficiency.

Pearkes had made arrangements to establish an advanced headquarters in Adak, but for several weeks he remained in Vancouver concentrating his attention on those regiments which might be called upon to reinforce or replace the "Greenlight" units. A number of these required some degree of housecleaning by replacing officers who were too old or misfits among both officers and men. These units also had to be brought up to strength and their training shaped to conform with conditions which might be expected in the north. If they were to develop the regimental spirit upon which Pearkes placed considerable emphasis, then the sooner these units were brought up to war establishment and reached the highest possible standard of efficiency, the better. His ideas in these matters were well known by his staff, and in Brigadiers W. H. S. Macklin and W. N.

¹⁶ W.D., H.Q., 13th Cdn. Inf. Bde., July 20, 1943.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1943.

Bostock, his two chief staff officers, Pearkes knew that his orders and suggestions would be carried out with zest and energy.¹⁸

A week before the Canadians embarked for Kiska Pearkes flew up to Adak to the advanced headquarters which he had established on the island. He also wanted to observe the brigade in its final training period. The full scale amphibious exercise on nearby Great Sitkin Island was just ending and it had been extremely useful. He visited the units every day and saw for himself that everything that could be done to ensure the success of their task had been done. "I was satisfied," he said later,

... that the troops would be able to give a good account of themselves, particularly in close combat. I was satisfied with the overwhelming strength that the forces had. With the five big battleships and cruisers there they could have blown the island off the face of the map almost. . . . The weather was more our greatest concern than actually the fear of the fighting but we knew the Japs would fight to the end if they were there.¹⁹ They had demonstrated at Attu . . . [that] many of them were prepared to fight to the very end. . . . So we had stressed the importance of individual combat and the use of the rifle and bayonet. Our men were fit . . . and would have given a good account of themselves.²⁰

On August 11 the Canadians left their tented camp on Adak and began to embark. The scene on the dock was a memorable one with newspaper correspondents and cameramen interviewing and photographing the American as well as the Canadian senior officers who were present. One of the Canadian public relations officers who was present recalled the scene:

As the Canadian troops marched aboard their transports . . . General Pearkes, in the pouring rain, stood at the gangplank and spoke to and shook hands with scores — perhaps hundreds of soldiers. General Buckner stood a few paces behind and watched the embarkation. In several instances General Pearkes would ask me to have such soldier photographed and send the photo to his mother. He would ask the man his name and the name of his hometown and wish him all good luck.

Some months later in Vancouver [I met Buckner] outside the Vancouver Hotel. We chatted about the Kiska experience and then General Buckner said: "Major, you remember that day on the dock at Adak?" "Yes, sir, I

¹⁸ Public Archives of Canada, Ralston Papers, Vol. 42, Box 31, Memorandum, G. S. Currie, Deputy Minister (Army) of National Defence to J. L. Ralston, July 19, 1943.

¹⁹ The brigade war diarist wrote on August 9: "Captain Bagley reports that almost all activity on Kiska had ceased; their radio to Japan is out and their radar no longer functions. Three guesses are made — one, they have evacuated; two, mutiny; three, they have abandoned their main camp and gone into the hills. If the latter is true then ours may well be the long hard job of digging them out."

²⁰ Interview with Pearkes, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

shall never forget it." "Well in all my years of service, I have never seen a senior commanding officer reach his men as General Pearkes did that day. I venture to say that every man to whom the general spoke really felt himself a soldier. What is his secret of reaching the men like that?" "It is quite simple, sir. He loves soldiers and they respond."²¹

In a sense, Pearkes was only doing something which came to him quite naturally. When he was an N.C.O. and later an officer in the Great War, he worked his men hard and did everything in his power to ensure that his platoon, company or battalion were well trained and provided for prior to going "over the top." Just as he moved among his men before leading them on the attack at Passchendaele, so he got close to the men who would attack Kiska. If he had any regrets, they were that he could not be with them, but as it was he was confident they would do their best.

As the transports were loaded they eased out into the harbour, now packed with ships of all sizes. It seems remarkable, in retrospect, that with almost 5,000 Canadian soldiers on board ship as part of a large invasion fleet, Pearkes did not have authority to permit them to sail. All during the period, from the time "Greenlight" Force was raised up to and including this point, the Canadian government had been very cautious about committing the troops to action. It was not because this was the first time a Canadian force would be operating in the field under senior American officers, but rather owing to the fact that a large proportion of the force was composed of home defence men. These soldiers had been conscripted for service in Canada under the National Resources Mobilization Act, but amendments to the act had widened the scope of this service to Newfoundland, the United States and, with the decision to partake in the Kiska operation, to Alaska. Under this amendment, passed on June 18, the Minister of National Defence "issued on 11 July a 'Direction' permitting the despatch of the 'Greenlight' Force for 'training, service or duty' at Adak or points in Alaska 'east of Adak' — i.e., those parts in the Aleutians then firmly in American hands."²² All the training and preparations to date had assumed that the Canadians would, in fact, be engaged, but the political caution in Ottawa, stemming probably from the Prime Minister, was illustrated not only by the appointment of Brigadier Lett as a liaison officer but also by the visits to the West Coast by the Chief of the General Staff, the Deputy Minister and, latterly, Major-General J. C. Murchie, the Vice Chief of the General Staff who was at Adak with Pearkes. These

²¹ Memorandum, Mr. Gus Sivertz to author, September 1966.

²² Stacey, *op. cit.*, p. 499.

officers, as well as Pearkes and Foster, kept Ottawa fully informed, and at each stage of the 13th Brigade's training, Pearkes and a senior officer from Ottawa assured the military authorities in Ottawa in writing of their satisfaction that the Force was properly equipped and trained. Kiska was not to be another Hong Kong or another Dieppe. Murchie had served as a major under Pearkes when he was the Director of Training in Ottawa, so both men knew each other well. It was not until the day before the brigade began to embark, however, that Murchie sent a telegram to Ottawa stating his satisfaction with the training, morale and equipment of the Force. He added that relations with the American commanders were good, that along with Pearkes and Foster he felt the plans represented a practical operation and that he could "recommend with Pearkes' and Foster's concurrence that authority be granted for the Canadian force to proceed and undertake proposed operations."²³ This telegram was sent on the evening of August 10, the same day Murchie left to fly back to Ottawa.

Meanwhile the troops were embarked, the plans laid and Pearkes waited with growing impatience for authority to send the brigade forward. As he stated later:

I was in a terrible predicament. . . . The plans the Americans had drawn up were based on Canadian cooperation. The troops had to embark [and] embarkation went ahead. I felt confident that Ottawa would approve; I didn't see how in the world they could back out. I wouldn't have backed out anyway — I couldn't. . . . I just made up my mind that if the message didn't come through that they were going. If it had come through with a definite order they were not to go, I'd have had to carry it out. But I couldn't upset the plans of an ally because communications were so bad [at Adak].

It was very worrying. . . . If I had carried out literally the instructions which Murchie gave me, those troops couldn't have been embarked. It was most unfair to put a commander in such a position.²⁴

It was not until the early hours of August 13, when the first ships of the invasion force were beginning to leave the harbour, that Pearkes received the telegram giving the Canadian Force permission to proceed. He asked to be taken out to Brigadier Foster on board the *David W. Branch*, the headquarters ship, and handed Foster his final instructions. Late that

²³ Prior to leaving, Murchie cautioned Pearkes that he must not permit the troops to leave without confirmation from Ottawa.

²⁴ Interview with Pearkes, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16. On August 12 Pearkes had written an official letter to Foster taking upon himself the authority to order Foster "to proceed under the command of General Charles H. Corlett for the occupation of the Island of Kiska and the destruction of the enemy forces thereon." See Directorate of History, "Progress Reports, Operation 'Greenlight'."

afternoon the Canadians, too, slipped out of the harbour and sailed westward.²⁵

²⁵ The story of the attack on Kiska is told in detail elsewhere. Unknown to the Allies, the Japanese garrison had been evacuated under the cover of fog late in July. Extremely poor weather conditions together with faulty information from Intelligence sources combined to lead the American commanders to believe the Japanese had abandoned their main bases and had taken up positions in the hills where they would fight to the end. As it was, when the assaults on Kiska were made on August 15 and 16, the combat teams found a deserted island. As the 13th Brigade war diarist put it as the Canadians were pushing south over the island to meet up with the Americans: "Reports continued to stream in pinpointing caches of Jap parachute bombs, rifles, L.M.Gs., ammo., food, clothing, etc. — also reports that every hill, more especially every high ridge, was alive with Jap positions and dummy positions. This would have been a terrific fight." Fortunately for everyone concerned, it was not. A few casualties, including some killed, were suffered from booby-traps left behind by the Japanese as well as from trigger-happy soldiers firing on their comrades who, in the excitement of the attack, they mistook for the enemy. Aside from these misfortunes, the worst the troops were to endure was the winter weather of the Aleutians.