

INTERVIEW WITH COMMANDER C.G. DIXON, NOV. 6, 1969

- D. . . . Ross said if General Pearkes was made Lieutenant-Governor he would never set foot in Government House.
- R. Ross was a veteran, wasn't he? Didn't he get the M.C. - all that sort of thing?
- D. He was a major.
- R. I thought so. What was the . . . ?
- D. No money.
- R. Was that the criterion?
- D. That was . . . same way with these - no money. As a matter of fact, he only stepped inside of Government House three times when Pearkes was here. Ross was the Honorary Colonel of the Canadian Scottish. Princess Mary came out - there was a dinner for her - he had to come. The second time, and it was within the same [visit], he had to pick Princess Mary up here as Honorary Colonel and escort her to the Bay Street Armoury. There was a trooping of the Colours at the Royal Athletic Park in Victoria and then they had a reception. He had to come to Government House to pick her up, so he came in and went into the drawing room, but there was a great hullabaloo before we got him in there. And the last time he came was at the last state dinner (the big one, they had men and women) and his wife was the Chancellor of the university and they both came. They didn't come to the first one, they came to the second one.

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Interruption -- a telegram received from Major the Hon. Francis Legh - he is the private secretary of the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret - from Buckingham Palace.

- D. I'm going to be there next week.

D. Now after Pearkes came into office, people started calling <sup>on</sup> him the Admiral and the Premier and things, and they were waiting out in front of the fireplace and if one man stayed a little too long the other one . . . and they'd pass through the hall. He was there about two weeks and he said, "By the way", (and people saw where in my office - you've seen our general office - I was in there at the desk. There's a switchboard and a controller and then we had some extra help in; maids were coming in, the chauffeur was coming in and hanging around.) And General Pearkes said, "This isn't good enough, to have the secretary's . . . you'd have confidential talks and things with the premier and with people in connection with me, and I don't think this is good enough." And he looked around the house, and then came out and said, "I know what we'll do. Mrs. Pearkes doesn't need this office. She hasn't got a private secretary; she doesn't need this office. We'll put a desk in her sitting room upstairs and she'll have it up there. You take over this office."

R. That would be the one over there?

D. Yes. The one that I had. And he said, "I'll take over this office." Fine. And he said, "That office can be used as a waiting room. We'll leave it as it is and people waiting can come in and they can sign the book and they can wait here and have a cigarette or we can have whiskey for them, or something, here. They can wait here; it can be used as a waiting room, for an office for the A.D.Cs. and for wives when they are here. And we can use it as a general sitting room and we'll use this as my office." And he put up his pictures and it worked out

very nicely. One other thing - just before the Rosses left, during Princess Margaret's visit to Victoria, Ross took a great disliking to me. He and I were - I <sup>practically</sup> worshipped him. . . . I helped that tour considerably and I helped the Rosses. As it turned out I was the confidant of Princess Margaret when she was here, and as a matter of fact we carried on a correspondence (in her own handwriting) for years. I've got a raft of letters from Princess Margaret in her own handwriting - 'Dear Gar' and signed 'Margaret'. . . . But anyway, Ross and Mrs. Ross took a great dislike to me. The Rosses had brought their daughter out who was more a contemporary to Margaret than me, but I was more a contemporary to Margaret than Pennington and Ross and Mrs. Ross. We became . . . not flip-pant, but we just hit a good note. She would ask for me . . . on a plane with the Premier and Ross and there'd be thirty people up there. At lunch, [she] had her private party, of course, she would send her private secretary up, "Have Commander Dixon come back and have lunch with us." The Rosses were furious. Well anyway, the Rosses took a great dislike to me and although we carried on he tried to have me fired at the time and whether he said it was my family or Pennington or someone, the Premier, I think, wouldn't. That's just a footnote.

After Pearkes got in, and he didn't know that the chauffeur had repeated what he said with General Pearkes, but then when he [Ross] found out that I had the office, he was annoyed and all his venom was directed towards me from then on. (That was the lieutenant-governor's office.)

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- D. I'll show you the pressures - to illustrate a point in General Pearkes' nature, that pressure was brought on him and he stuck to his guns.
- R. . . . this letter on January 8th where he says, "You were kind enough to invite Mrs. Ross to the State Dinner which she would naturally like to attend as she would any invitation given her by Mrs. Pearkes and your good self. Neither Mrs. Ross or I will ever cross the threshold of Government House if the secretary is in attendance at the time for good and sufficient reason. Should he be at the State Dinner, of course, Mrs. Ross would not attend. It may be impossible for you to make any change in arrangements and if it is I should be glad if you would advise me. I myself am going to Scotland . . . ." What on earth did Pearkes say to that?
- D. I didn't see Pearkes' letter.
- R. You know the file that I got - there's nothing of that on it.
- D. Well those were kept in a separate file. I thought you would have them, and I didn't see Pearkes'.
- R. No, in fact the whole batch that I got were very, very bland indeed. Now, these I think, Gar, were the ones that you gave me, possibly at the office.
- D. General Pearkes doesn't know I have these - no one knows.
- R. Let's put it this way - if I know that you have them. This is the sort of thing I wouldn't necessarily go into but there are

some points here that help to explain certain things. But in a book on Pearkes I wouldn't necessarily take a swipe at - a direct swipe, at least - at the Rosses, but I never realized that they were like this. And I think you mentioned, too, that when they left . . . didn't you say that they had destroyed all their correspondence - just took it out and burned it or something like that?

D. I was on holidays - yes. I came back and the stenographer was in tears. Things that shouldn't have been destroyed had been.

R. Would they have the right to do this?

D. No, but he's the Lieutenant-Governor - who's going to stop him? We come under the instructions of the Government Disposal Act, you know, and they send in what they want destroyed, more than ten years old, or recent, and that includes the listing of it . . . the Archives do this. Now here are two people, they are supposed to be brilliant - she particularly, Chancellor of a university - and this was done largely at her instigation - who were able . . . . And here I am a little civil servant.

R. I can't help but think from what you said that they must have been so damned put out, or miffed, or what have you, because of your closeness to Princess Margaret. That's the only thing I can think of. You know, how dare this person who is hired, who doesn't have the millions - probably half a million in any event.

D. Yes, they're both millionaires.

R. And this has never cooled off, I take it, in the years?

- D. No. Mrs. Ross is just . . . we'll say I'm here and she'll just say how-do-you-do recently. But she's passed me in the hall as if she's never seen me. And I passed him . . . shortly after he left I was at a funeral with the Lieutenant-Governor. It must have been the Chief Justice probably. And he was at the back of the church, you know, to welcome them, and he . . . . Did he say in one of these places that he would hit me?
- R. Let's see, this one is on the 31st of May, 1962 - he says, "Your Honour, this letter which I feel I owe to Your Honour and to Mrs. Pearkes is an extremely difficult one for me to write in that it refers to a situation which has been continually embarrassing to both my wife and myself ever since we vacated Government House. We hold the position you occupy in the highest regard and anything we have done or must do must not be taken as a reflection on that office and certainly not on Your Honour or Mrs. Pearkes to whom we wish only a great deal of happiness and success in the office you hold. It has been impossible for us to accept any invitation which you were kind enough to give us in the past, or the present invitations during the visit of Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal because Mrs. Ross and I will never put a foot across the threshold of Government House as long as the present secretary is employed there." He doesn't say anything there on the 31st.
- D. There's one letter he says as old as he was he would hit me.
- R. Again on the 10th, '63, he says, "I know you will agree with me

that the first duty of any man is to save his wife embarrassment and as I have informed you, neither my wife nor I will ever under any circumstance be at a function where the present secretary of Government House is present." It sounds incredible, utterly incredible.

- D. Now, to jump eight years, when this new man came in - I'll give you one more letter and then that will be the end of this little episode - he came up and called on General Pearkes. . He never once asked General Pearkes anything about the office - what was done, what he did, how it was done or the locations or the maids, or anything. Neither did they discuss anything - not a word - with Mrs. Pearkes. But they went to Ross, and the Rosses haven't been held in higher levels ever since. I stayed in my office - in that office - and then he came in here and he'd been in about a week, and I came in one morning and he said, "I'm going to change office with you. I like the shape of the office and I'd like that office. I'm going to change office." So I said, "Oh well, we used that as a general . . ." (one thing I never referred, or said General Pearkes did it this way, or the Rosses did it this way. The whole staff, we've never once said this is the way it was done.) I said, "this office was used as a waiting room for people coming in, and for V.I.Ps. to wait, and A.D.Cs. . . ." "No", he said, "we'll change." So he went in and started getting the books and changed - right away, he couldn't wait. . . .
- He came in July 1st, '68. What date is that?

- R. 18th November, '68.

- R. I like this bit - "Now that you have restored Government House to its former dignity . . ."
- D. That's why I kept that letter.
- R. ". . . by using the office so carefully prepared for the Lieutenant-Governor I have had a change of heart regarding my picture." I remember Pearkes saying that Ross would never give it. Oh boy! Had you ever heard either directly or indirectly any unfavourable comment about you being in the other one?
- D. No. People, mostly, thought it was a good move - people who knew of it.
- R. It was a sensible move. "It still cuts Phyllis and myself that the many things you have done to make Government House look as it was before prompts my action. . . ." Oh boy.