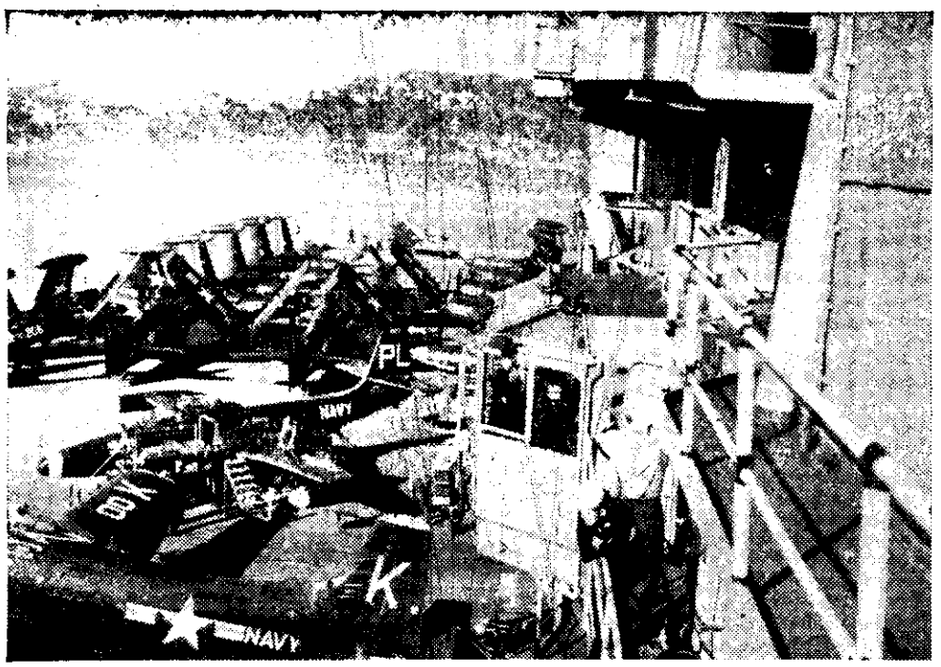

N.P.S. photograph

LEFT: Piston and jet-engined planes on the flight-deck of the Tarawa at Wellington

887 Feet Long and Flat on Top

DURING the Pacific war a British destroyer lay alongside an American aircraft-carrier to refuel. An American seaman leaned over the carrier's guardrail and hailed a dejected-looking A.B. shuffling along the destroyer's upper deck: "Hey, Jack! How's the second biggest navy in the world?" "All right," replied the Briton. "How's the second best?" Not without reason, the U.S. magazine *Saturday Evening Post* published this anecdote under the heading, "The Perfect Squelch."

In spite of this tradition of rivalry there was hardly a squelch to be heard as the U.S. carrier Tarawa (T'rawa to her men) berthed at Wellington. Even the berthing party (perhaps the most impeccably dressed berthing party ever seen) from H.M.N.Z.S. Kiwi seemed awed by the massive bulk of the ship whose lines they handled.

On board, the carrier's complement had worked to maintain the initial good impression. One could believe the officer who asserted that "courtesy voyages mean more work than operations—getting the ship clean between ports." The route from the gangway to "Captain's Country" gleamed with fresh paint. Even the stainless-steel fittings had been polished, for, in the U.S. Navy, as in the British, tradition dies hard.

But there were differences. Perhaps the best known name in the U.S. Navy is that of Josephus Daniels. As Secretary of the Navy in 1914, this man made America's men-o'-war "dry." The bosun's pipe can still be heard in U.S. ships, but it never precedes the pleasantly ambiguous call "Up spirits." Coffee is the staple drink and the navy the largest single consumer of the bean. In other respects, the American Navy still cleaves to traditions derived from its British progenitor. Seamen still wear the blue collar with three white stripes, even subscribing to the mistaken belief that it commemorates Nelson's "three great battles." Warrant Officers are addressed as Mister, and the Marines still function as the sentries and jailors of the Navy.

With her escorting destroyer O'Bannon, the Tarawa made her goodwill visit to Wellington after attending ceremonies in Australia to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea. An Atlantic Fleet ship, she had steamed 40,000 miles since leaving her home port of Norfolk, Virginia, last November. Goodwill visits were paid to Algeria, Italy, France, Spain, Ceylon and Singapore before the ship joined up with the U.S. Seventh Fleet for duty in Korean waters.

Of 27,000 tons displacement, the Tarawa is 887 feet long and 129 wide. Slab-sided in appearance, she stands out of the water a maximum of 158 feet, and can accommodate 101 aircraft. She carries a number of different types. The most spectacular, perhaps, is the F9F-6 Cougar, a machine comparable with the Russian MIG-15 and the U.S. Air Force Sabre. In the 650 m.p.h. class, it is capable, in a dive, of penetrating the sound barrier. Others aboard are the Cougar's elder brother, the Panther, also a fighter; the photo-reconnaissance jet Banshee, and the fast, propeller-driven attack Skyraider. The last, a single-engined, single-seat plane, is capable of carrying six tons of bombs—a greater load than that carried by the Flying Fortresses of World War II. In addition to these, the carrier has a few of the U.S. Navy's remaining Corsairs, now used as night fighters, and a helicopter for rescue work.

For a warship, the Tarawa has a remarkable amount of living and recreation space. There are three canteens, a hobby shop offering facilities for wood, leather, jewellery and photographic work, a 5000-book library and, of course, the hangar deck, available for pictures, sports, lectures and church services. The health of the ship's 2700 men is cared for by three doctors, three dentists and a combined staff of 36 assistants. As the vessel's publicity brochure boasts: "A tooth or an appendix can be extracted with equal ease."

The Tarawa, launched in 1945, takes her name from the island of Tarawa in the Gilbert Group. The atoll was stormed by American troops in November, 1943, and wrested from the Japanese after one of the bloodiest single engagements of the war. The two flags, American and British (Tarawa is a British possession), which were first hoisted over the battered beaches now occupy a place of honour on the hangar deck of the carrier. The Tarawa herself has had an entirely peaceful career, being used for training and for goodwill cruises throughout the world. The truce was operating in Korea by the time she arrived in those waters.

ADMIRAL HALSEY ON SEA POWER

As Commander of Allied Naval Forces in the South Pacific, Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey was one of the most dynamic—and for New Zealanders one of the most important—of the naval leaders of World War II. When he revisited us last week the NZBS broadcast an interview with him. Here is a summary of the questions and answers.

Are navies still necessary?

I believe they are and will be in the foreseeable future. Two-thirds of the surface of the earth is covered by water. In the case of an island, the whole communications depend upon water . . . the shipment of supplies and so forth. And the only way to keep those lanes open are navies, at the moment. It may change in the future, but as I see it there'll be no change at the present.

Do you think we'll see again the battle fleets of 1914-18, or the task forces of 1939-45?

Certainly not the battle fleets of 1914-18. The task forces of 1939-45, I think more than probable. The aircraft carrier is still a very important thing, because to control the sea it's necessary to control the air over the sea, and the aircraft carrier is the best weapon I know to control that.

What change do you think atomic weapons will make in the role of navies in the future and on the composition of future fleets?

I know little about atomic weapons except for the two bombs that were dropped on Japan and what I've read about the experiments we've made since then. But as far as a pure atomic weapon is concerned, I think it will mean just a greater dispersal of the fleet—no, no dispersal, a larger separation of the ships of the fleet. As to the hydrogen bomb, I know nothing at all about that except what I've seen in the pictures, and I don't see how they're going to get any plane to drop that, unless it's a Kamikaze plane, and I don't think we'd train our people to be Kamikaze pilots. Of course, there may be some way of flying it from a controlled missile. If that's the case . . . but I refuse to look in a crystal ball.

N.P.S. photo
Admiral Halsey

With the increase in high-powered, long-range aircraft and ships, will fewer Pacific bases be needed?

Well, of course, you people of the British Commonwealth of Nations have always been dependent on bases for your fleet. During the last war, we had no bases and we had to build up a system of supporting our ships under way. With a few bases we were able to do that, so I presume the same thing would happen in any future war.

Technical advances in weapons and equipment mean that scientists and technicians will play a very important role in wars of the future. What effect will this have, or is this having, on the training of officers and men?

I've been retired since 1947, and I'm not *au fait* with what is going on now. But the scientists have certainly come into their own, and the technicians, and to my knowledge they are helping greatly in training men in anti-submarine devices and such things.

Do you think there is a place left for the seaman—the man who is purely a seaman and has no other technical skills?

I don't see how you're going to get along in this world without seamen. There's not enough gasoline in the world to supply—if you could do it by aeroplanes—to supply the aeroplanes to transport the equipment that you're going to need. If there was, it would take so many men to service those aeroplanes at both ends of the line that it would be very difficult. So, as I say again, in the foreseeable future I think any nation that's going to win a war has to control the sea, and to control the sea, she has to control the air over the sea and the waters under the sea.

What differences do you see in the navy's plans for the Pacific and the Atlantic?

In the Atlantic there has been a drill—a set of drills—by the Nato forces over there—most of them in Europe, I think. The Commander-In-Chief of our Atlantic Fleet is the senior naval officer of all the Nato countries over there, and I know they've had several exercises over there and I know that our fleet in the Mediterranean has exercised with the French and with the British Fleets both. And I hope before it's through that we'll do the same thing out here in the Pacific with our friendly navies.