

Haeremai, Te Waka!

THE 1925 UNITED STATES FLEET VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND AND ITS STRATEGIC CONTEXT

‘THIS REMOTE outpost in the Pacific’, the *Evening Post* wrote of New Zealand in 1925, ‘... looks upon the American fleet as a friend and protector.’ Evoking memories of the Great White Fleet’s voyage in 1908, this armada of US warships visited the Australasian dominions during July and August 1925, paying homage to that ‘uncovenanted friendship between the British Empire and the United States which ... is the strongest guarantee for the security of both parties and the peace of the world’.¹ This impressive piece of seafaring, unlike the global cruise of the Great White Fleet, has not been fully analyzed.² The absence of any published account of the New Zealand part of the visit creates an entirely false impression about its significance. This article is intended to rectify the situation not only by recounting the events of 1925, but also by examining the politico-strategic context of the voyage.

The United States evolved a threefold policy towards the Far East in the period after the European war: exclusion of ‘Asiatics’; maintenance of the ‘Open Door’ in China; and retention of the Philippines. The level of commitment which Washington displayed towards these goals both waxed and waned. An acrimonious debate broke out, too, about how effectively the US could safeguard its interests. With non-participation in the League of Nations confirmed, the defensive arm of American policy in the Far East was the US Navy, which relied, like the Royal Navy, upon Admiral Mahan’s notion of a ‘Fleet-in-Being’ rather than on a regional presence.

The Great White Fleet — commanded first by Admiral ‘Fighting Bob’ Evans and later by Admiral Charles S. Sperry — had visited only Auckland on its way to Australia. It represented the aggressive ‘Big Stick’ diplomacy of President Theodore Roosevelt and carried a clear message to Japan, where it also paid a courtesy call. The cruise by the USN in 1925 was for its part indicative of the continuing naval rivalry between the major Pacific powers. Naval tensions remained a serious threat to peace despite the work of the Washington Disarmament Conference and the widespread acceptance of its terms. Practical

1 *Evening Post* (EP), 11 August 1925, p.6.

2 For accounts of the earlier visit, see Robert A. Hart, *The Great White Fleet: Its Voyage around the World, 1907-1909*, Boston & Toronto, 1965, and James R. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet*, Annapolis, 1988, ch.10. Some of the strategic context of 1925 is provided in Ian McGibbon, *Blue-Water Rationale: The Naval Defence of New Zealand 1914-1942*, Wellington, 1981, especially pp.160-4.

statesmanship and protracted discussions produced only limited achievements. No plan for general disarmament was either intended or accomplished.

'The conclusion of the Washington conference', according to Roger Dingman, 'marked the end of one order of seapower and the beginning of another.'³ Above all, a new disposition of power was imposed in the Pacific, where the Royal Navy was eclipsed by the emerging strength of the USN and, more completely and ominously, by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Harsh postwar circumstances had changed the regional balance in ways which greatly alarmed both US and British diehards. Restraint of Japan emerged as an important Anglo-American goal as surely as the means to achieve that end remained vague and elusive. Thenceforth, only the emphasis upon self-imposed observance of the international agreements signed at Washington kept the powers from what Walter Lippman called 'the drift into a ruinous and indecisive war'.⁴ Such reliance upon Japanese goodwill was an issue of serious concern for the southwest Pacific dominions of the no-longer-mighty British Empire.

The Four-Power Treaty, for example, was no more than an attempt to preserve regional stability by dismantling antiquated politico-strategic arrangements like the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, replacing them with a diplomatic agreement flexible enough to acknowledge the altered situation in the Pacific. But USN spokesmen remained sceptical. They noted the absence of military sanctions against Japan and drew attention to other perceived weaknesses of the package which emerged from Washington. They were convinced that the US delegation had contributed to making the country 'bothersome rather than influential' in the Pacific.⁵ Indeed, as George Davis noted so long ago, the Washington conference shifted the naval equation in favour of defence, leaving Japan and the US with supremacy in their respective home waters. In regard to the Far Eastern theatre, 'even the superior American fleet could undertake a transoceanic adventure only at grave peril'.⁶

The Admiralty devoted much time and effort, of course, to convincing the Australasian dominions that the Royal Navy was adequate to their needs, that only a small contribution towards construction of the Singapore base and a little assistance with related aspects of Imperial defence was required to preserve regional security. At the same time, London sought to prove that American aid was simply not feasible, given the lack of any US base in the western Pacific. Strategists like Admiral Beatty sharply contested the views of a maverick like W.M. Hughes, who had told the 1921 Imperial Conference that Australia 'must turn to America'.⁷

3 Roger Dingman, *Power in the Pacific: The Origins of Naval Arms Limitation, 1914-1922*, Chicago, 1976, p.215.

4 Quoted in Dean Acheson, *This Vast Eternal Realm*, New York, 1973, p.52.

5 Betty Glad, *Charles Evans Hughes and the Illusions of Innocence*, Urbana & London, 1966, p.285.

6 George T. Davis, *A Navy Second to None: The Development of Modern American Naval Policy*, New York, 1940, p.142.

7 United Kingdom. Parliament. *Summary of Proceedings of the 1921 Imperial Conference, 14th Meeting*, Cmd. 1474, 1921.

For their part, Americans were just as capable of deceiving themselves. Beatty argued that the Philippines would quickly fall to Japanese attack, but US tacticians — even at their most pessimistic — theorized that enemy forces could not occupy the entire archipelago, leaving places such as Dumanquilas Bay in Mindanao as potential ports of arrival for an American fleet. Each of the English-speaking powers exaggerated its own position, while drastically underestimating that of Japan. Australia and New Zealand were caught in the middle of a debilitating Anglo-American competition for regional leadership; a struggle based upon a comparison of weaknesses rather than strengths.

Driven by their alarm about alleged concessions at the Washington conference, USN planners sought desperately to overcome the problems basic to their War Plan Orange, the blueprint for fighting the Far Eastern enemy in its own home waters. Japan had provoked the building programme of the 1916 Naval Act and remained a major concern during the postwar years. Whatever the significance of global rivalry with Britain, US Navy men decided that Japanese hegemony in the western Pacific was the gravest threat to the interests of the United States. They realized, too, that US forces could not intervene in the region without some improvement to the situation. Base acquisition, repair facilities and supply from friendly sources, and even allied assistance were discussed in various studies, but with no specific or convincing resolution. Japan had the upper hand and was unlikely to lose it. War Plan Orange consequently assumed aspects not so much of a strategy for the Pacific theatre as of a flawed and unrealistic pipedream.

Early in 1922, the Japanese government revised its strategy so as to narrow the radius of the defensive cordon maintained around the home islands. US observers were alarmed, however, by Tokyo's stated intention to safeguard its supply lines from neighbouring countries. An official USN review of post-conference problems asserted that Japanese expansionism would probably resume in the future. Although Anglo-American co-operation could restrain such ambitions, it was deemed unlikely that Britain would be an ally at the beginning of hostilities. But eventual British involvement was inevitable, which brought use of the bases at Hong Kong and Singapore into consideration.⁸

Japan's development of long-range submarines worried US planners to such an extent that they resuscitated the so-called southern route across the Pacific. One of three possible ways to move westward, it stretched from Hawaii through Samoa and the Admiralty Islands to the Philippines. It was especially useful for vessels transiting through the Panama Canal. Although rejected as the main route, it was identified as an excellent alternative for the supply train. It became part of the general plan to have the US Fleet superior by at least one quarter over the Imperial Japanese Navy and ready to leave Pearl Harbor only two weeks after the outbreak of hostilities.⁹ Tokyo's new undersea forces posed a grave threat to this scheme, aggravating the need to test the trans-Pacific capabilities of the USN itself.

8 Blue-Orange: Estimate of the Situation, September 1922, Strategic Plans Division, Series 3, Box 64, Operational Archives, Washington Navy Yard.

9 Memorandum from the War Plans Division to the Chief of Naval Operations, 9 June 1923, *ibid.*

American naval strategists confronted this problem in aggressively strategic terms, seeking to increase the ability of the US Fleet to cross the Pacific in sufficiently battle-ready condition to engage the Far Eastern enemy in its home waters. Many American planners believed, as one commentator noted, 'that the Pacific will be the theatre of a tremendous struggle, with their republic on the one hand and Japan on the other'.¹⁰ Those of such bellicose persuasion received virtually no encouragement from the largely unsympathetic Republican administration, a parsimonious Congress, and a tax-burdened, resentful public.¹¹ In lieu of curtailed building programmes, therefore, US strategists sought to determine the exact capabilities and limitations of their existing naval forces.

The need to assess the fighting strength of the USN was made even more urgent in respect of the Battle Fleet because it had been stationed in Pacific waters only since mid-1921.¹² The Navy Department had to confront a range of problems associated with 'fleeting up' a naval force which was unaccustomed to operating as a unit and unquestionably deficient in most areas of marine technology. But while the task was immense, so was the responsibility: 'If there are nations still inclined to unscrupulous aggression, it would be harmful, not helpful, to the cause of peace to lead them to believe that to avoid war the United States is ready to take successive steps of withdrawal in the Pacific. Such a course would only serve to pile up trouble for future generations.'¹³ A consequence of this prevalent Navy attitude was the struggle to gain the requisite Congressional appropriations to allow a long-distance Pacific cruise by the US Fleet. For various reasons, funds were not approved until 1924.

Twice in the period before the Fleet visit to Australasia, minor bursts of enthusiasm were elicited by the arrival of US warships — one in New Zealand, the other in Australia, and both in 1923. The first was a call by the governor of American Samoa, Captain E.T. Pollock, on board USS *Ontario*. The station vessel at Pago Pago, USS *Ontario* came to Auckland for repairs. The welcome which New Zealand extended to the American party was so overwhelming that the local consul asked for presidential acknowledgement of 'the unusual courtesies'. Representatives of the host government made speeches emphasizing Anglo-Saxon solidarity, while Captain Pollock noted in turn that the United States and the southwest Pacific dominions 'had been gradually getting closer together'.¹⁴ The USS *Milwaukee* detoured to Australia later in the same year, but such minor incidents gave no indication of what was in store apart from revealing that wartime frictions and postwar jealousies seemed to have melted away.

10 Robert Machray, 'The Situation in the Far East', *Fortnightly Review*, 1 January 1925, p.75.

11 Cf. US Congress. House. Committee on Appropriations. *Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Naval Appropriation Bill*. 67th Cong., 2nd sess., 1922.

12 *New York Times*, 19 June 1921, p.2. For details, see Robert E. Johnson, *Thence Round Cape Horn: The Story of United States Naval Forces on Pacific Station, 1918-1923*, Annapolis, 1963, p.191.

13 C.C. Gill, 'The New Far East Doctrine', *US Naval Institute Proceedings* (September 1922), p.1486.

14 Despatch from the American Consul in Auckland (Karl McVitty), 15 May 1923, State Dept Decimal File 811.3347h, RG 59, National Archives (NA), Washington, DC. See also *Auckland Star*, 30 April 1923, p.6; and *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), 1 May 1923, p.10.

Interestingly, perhaps, the captain of the USS *Milwaukee* was not allowed to send aircraft over Sydney harbour as 'the same request might some time come from Japanese officers'.¹⁵

Meanwhile, New Zealanders were briefly introduced to a display of their own empire's strength at sea. The British Special Service Squadron, commanded by Admiral Sir Frederick Field, visited the southwest Pacific early in 1924. It consisted of the mightiest warship afloat, HMS *Hood*, and the battle-cruiser HMS *Repulse*, accompanied by four other British light cruisers, the dominion's own new cruiser *Dunedin*, and — during the New Zealand part of the voyage — by HMAS *Adelaide*. With a vigorous debate underway about the size and nature of the contribution the dominions should make to imperial defence, antipodean pundits were considering two alternatives: a payment towards construction of the Singapore base or a further investment in light cruisers. The visit of the squadron did not so much push sentiment one way or the other as engender a more sympathetic attitude towards the requirements of imperial defence in general. Admiral Field and his warships sparked an atavistic response on the outer marches of the British Empire.

The southwest Pacific dominions put great store by the Royal Navy and its ability to assert supremacy at sea. Unlike its larger neighbour across the Tasman, however, New Zealand was more inclined to accept that imperial defence could be guaranteed in the European theatre. Local naval units were needed only to prevent coastal raids and to keep open the sea-lanes. Japanese expansionism did not loom quite so large as for Australia.

Then as now, New Zealand adopted a broader perspective encouraged by its greater isolation. Its concerns actually transcended the Pacific strategy which was becoming more and more relevant for Australia: New Zealand took a holistic approach to the defence of the British Empire and sought worldwide protection of trade routes as the primary goal. The New Zealand government remained a strong advocate of imperial unity, resisting the radical theory popular elsewhere that the United States should take over a supervisory role in the Pacific while Britain continued as chief protector of Anglo-American interests in the Atlantic. According to the view from Wellington, the defence of global interests could not be compartmentalized nor even partially entrusted to the goodwill of a major rival.

Nor had the desire for further peace initiatives run its course. The proposed trans-Pacific cruise by the US Navy contrasted sharply with discussions to prepare the way for another disarmament meeting. International sentiment seemed receptive to a resumption of the work of the Washington conference. President Coolidge was anxious to extend armaments limitation to include cruisers and submarines as well as land and air forces while, at the same time, achieving similar political mileage to his predecessor. Much of the pressure for further negotiations stemmed from tensions in Europe, making a disturbing counterpoint to American activities in the Pacific. Friction between Britain, France and Germany provoked calls for more disarmament; US suspicions

¹⁵ Letter from the American Consul in Sydney (E.M.Lawton), 22 September 1923, State Dept Decimal File 847.7961, RG 59, NA.

about Japanese intentions in the Far East led to a massive show of naval strength.

According to tentative arrangements, the annual exercises of the USN, which were planned to take place around the Hawaiian Islands early in 1925, would conclude with a voyage to Australasia by a large section of the Battle Fleet and its auxiliaries. Of the 127 ships engaged in the manoeuvres, 57 were assigned to undertake the trip to the southwest Pacific. The flagship *Seattle*, the battleships *Pennsylvania*, *Oklahoma* and *Nevada*, several light cruisers (including *Omaha*, *Richmond* and *Memphis*), as well as nearly 30 destroyers and support vessels, were to call at Melbourne and Wellington. The battleship divisions, comprising the mighty *California* and seven other capital ships, were to visit Sydney and Auckland.

To the southwest Pacific dominions, always eager advocates of greater Anglo-American collaboration, a visit by the USN was more than acceptable. In fact, the State Department in Washington believed that the likelihood of an effusive welcome made 'this fleet business . . . a pretty dangerous proposition'.¹⁶ The Tokyo press duly attacked the proposed USN cruise and, linking it to the discriminatory Immigration Act of 1924, interpreted the American attitude as hostile and provocative. The *New York Times*, on the other hand, dismissed the idea that the cruise was in any way an object lesson to Japan. The exercise was simply a test of the capabilities of men and ships. But the Japanese took umbrage quite early, perceiving an ulterior purpose and deploring the 'broad hint' that in the event of war the US would make common cause with the Antipodean dominions. Tokyo responded coldly to the remarks of Fleet visit participants who — warmed by feelings of Anglo-Saxon kinship — were rendered impolitic by their own alcohol-assisted eloquence.¹⁷

At least one Japanese newspaper argued that improvement of Hawaiian defences would lead to further fortification throughout the Pacific. The Tokyo *Yamato* suggested that the United States, as sponsor of the Washington Disarmament Conference, should set an example of restraint by ignoring those antipodean leaders who insisted 'that the American fleet must defend Australia against a Japanese invasion until the Australian defenses are complete'. Linked with news that Pearl Harbor was to become 'the strongest military outpost in the world', the cruise to Australasia was viewed from Tokyo as part of 'a secret plot tending to agitate the ocean'.¹⁸

Japanese opinion in the main was that US activities indicated a lack of faith in Nipponese intentions or in the long-term value of the Four Power Treaty. This belief, that the United States did not accept Japan as a sincere and honest member of the regional arrangement which had emerged from the Washington negotiations, was a devastating setback for American diplomacy. Once remarked, it might alone have been sufficient cause for the State Department to undertake damage control and cancel the proposed trans-Pacific cruise had not a more nationalistic and uncompromising point of view gained ground in Washington.

16 Memorandum from the Division of Western European Affairs (William Castle) to the Assistant Secretary of State, 10 February 1925, State Dept Decimal File 811.3347/51, RG 59, NA.

17 cf. *New York Times*, 3 July 1925, p.1; and *Japan Chronicle* (Kobe), 20 May 1925, p.1.

18 Quoted in the *Literary Digest* (LD), 30 May 1925, p.17.

US officialdom was confronted by a dilemma, of course. The Fleet visit, already announced by the Navy Department, could only be cancelled at some cost to American prestige, a concession which Washington authorities proved unwilling to make. Even Charles Evans Hughes was moved to remark: 'To change the Navy's plans because of ill-advised agitation would only postpone trouble and make it more difficult in the future to do the right thing.'¹⁹ A serious effort was undertaken by the State Department, nevertheless, to contain adverse aspects of the exercise. One adviser suggested that 'we ought . . . to put our consuls, if they can be trusted, on to the dangers which may arise and have them understand clearly that we shall expect the fullest reports about what goes on.'²⁰ Above all, Washington officials wanted to minimize the political fall-out from the visit and prevent any incidents which might cause international embarrassment.

In New Zealand on the eve of the Fleet visit, his own military experts warned Prime Minister J.G. Coates about the European situation and its bearing upon imperial defence: 'If Great Britain must undeniably associate herself with European affairs it is aimless for us to say that Imperial Communications are of more importance to us than European Peace Pacts. The peace of the world must first come from unity in Europe and some such balance of power that will make the possibility of war remote. In that respect it would seem that New Zealand must stand by the British Government in any step that is taken to promote international security and peace. Having established that, the security of the Imperial communications is assured by virtue of the first and more important step.'²¹ New Zealand stood to gain considerably from maintenance of European security. As Coates later indicated to the 1926 Imperial Conference, his dominion would have identified itself with the British signing of the Locarno Pact save for the threat such endorsement posed to imperial unity.

A strategic element was clearly present in all the discussion of amity between the British Empire and the US. Frequent reference was made to the isolated position of the southwest Pacific dominions, the 'outposts of Great Britain'.²² The advantage of fostering cordial relations with an Anglo-Saxon power capable of providing support for the British naval presence in the Pacific was an attractive assumption. A few local observers had even begun thinking along lines similar to William Howard Gardiner, polemicist and Vice President of the US Navy League; they perceived the benefits of resting Anglo-American interests upon both the development of British bases and the strengthening of the US Fleet. Gardiner himself had recommended that construction of the Singapore base be expedited and the USN be brought up to treaty limits so that 'America and Britain may feel reasonably prepared to maintain equity, peace and their interests in the Pacific.'²³ This far-reaching idea, however, was probably more popular

19 Quoted in Gerald Wheeler, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor: The United States Navy and the Far East, 1921-1931*, Columbia, 1963, p.36.

20 Castle to the Assistant Secretary of State, 10 February 1925, State Dept Decimal File 811.3347/51, RG 59, NA.

21 Memorandum by the Intelligence Branch, GHQ, 1 July 1925, quoted in McGibbon, p.163.

22 NZH, 11 August 1925, p.10.

23 W.H. Gardiner, 'America and Britain in the Far East', *Fortnightly Review*, 1 November 1924, p.610.

with Australian strategists. New Zealanders seem to have clung longer to the wistful notion that the Royal Navy (buttressed by the RAN and units of the New Zealand Division) could still play a role in the Pacific theatre.

From the outset, the antipodean response came from the larger dominion. The Australian government adapted the Fleet visit to suit its own purposes and exercised a tight supervision over initial plans through its representative in New York. No interest was shown in co-operating with New Zealand. Likewise, Australians later paid scant attention to the visit once the US warships had left Melbourne and Sydney, although one reason for this lack of interest was probably the jaded exhaustion of the people in these cities after a fortnight of hosting 25,000 young American sailors.

On the other hand, the New Zealand press had to satisfy an impatient citizenry's desire for news even before the Fleet arrived in Australia. The warships made an uneventful voyage from Hawaii. Just before their Australian landfall, the SS *Moeraki*, a coastal steamer bound for Sydney itself, encountered them 200 hundred miles off the eastern seaboard. As a final anticipatory gesture, newspapers gave considerable attention to this meeting. The *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: 'Perhaps no one will ever realise the immensity and power of the fleet so well as those people who came on deck in the cold darkest hours before dawn, and watched the battleships.' *Moeraki's* rather bewildered fourth officer said: 'I've never seen anything like it . . . It was awful.' An observant passenger recounted: 'First we came upon scout destroyers, which were followed by two flotillas of destroyers; then came the flagship *Seattle*, and the hospital ship; then, most magnificent of all sights, the three lines of battleships. They looked like lines of poetry, or a pattern drawn on the sea.'²⁴

Newspapers, which had begun their publicity efforts from the time of the Hawaiian exercises, stepped up their coverage considerably after the Australian landfall. The warships spent two weeks in Melbourne (still the capital) and Sydney, with an excursion to Hobart by four cruisers. The welcome was extraordinary. The sailors marched through city streets; formal and informal greetings were exchanged; balls, dances and concerts were held every night; and a range of social and sporting events was arranged. An overwhelming amount of local hospitality was forthcoming and many entertainments provided, but less salubrious activities led to a spate of mishaps, brawls, drunkenness and arrests. Rowdiness and misbehaviour, however, were well down on figures for the prewar tour by the Great White Fleet.

Advertising went to bizarre extremes as local retailers sought to capitalize on the visit. A Buy Australia-Made campaign in full swing was compromised to an extent by praise for US imports. Gilbeys Gin exercised a degree of effrontery by selling their product as a dry drink for sailors from a dry country. The Pelaco menswear company used an offensively racist stereotype to promote their shirts. 'Peter Mack and his tailors welcome Admiral Coontz and his sailors', trumpeted one entrepreneur. While other advertisers plumbed the depths of bad taste — one used-car salesman boasting a broadside of motor vehicles to match the big

²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 1925, p.13.

guns of the battleships — few traders reported any substantial increase in profits, with the exception of hotels and liquor merchants. Several shopkeepers were resentful that the visitors found local offerings inferior to their own products. Nevertheless, a number of businesses embarked on educational programmes, mounting photographic exhibitions, arranging competitions, and the like.

The mighty armada — which had clearly touched the wellsprings of the Australian spirit — departed for New Zealand on 5 August, a day typically bleak and overcast, though the weather was ignored to the end.²⁵ Enormous crowds saw the vessels sail majestically away, including a number of bluejackets who had failed to rejoin their ships. The passage of the Fleet across the Tasman Sea was so rough that several destroyers suffered minor damage. Throughout the entire voyage from Hawaii, these small escorts suffered annoying mishaps as a result of buffetings during heavy weather. The cruise provided disappointing evidence that, despite their traditional value to a battle fleet, destroyers were unreliable for such long-range operations.

The ships reached their ports of call in New Zealand during 10 and 11 August, the largest units dividing between Wellington and Auckland while the tender *Melville*, 12 destroyers, and the supply ships visited Dunedin and the main destroyer squadrons under Rear Admiral Frank Schofield went to Lyttelton. The Wellington contingent led by Commander-in-Chief Admiral Robert E. Coontz comprised the Flagship *Seattle*, the battleships *Pennsylvania*, *Oklahoma*, and *Nevada*, several heavy cruisers, and various support ships. Eight battleships under the command of Admiral S.S. Robison, including the mighty *California* (Flagship) and the even larger *Colorado* and *Maryland*, went to Auckland. The visitors to Wellington numbered 456 officers and over 6300 men; to Auckland, 694 officers and nearly 11,000 men. In welcoming them, Coates spoke of the pleasant relations which New Zealand enjoyed with its Pacific neighbours, including the US and Japan, and made several references to the need for regional peace. Admiral Coontz responded by emphasizing that his nation prized 'the doctrine of peace with honour'.²⁶

The bitter anti-Japanese tone present in much Australian oratory was far less evident in New Zealand speech-making and commentary. Coates paid special tribute in his welcoming remarks to the considerable help which the Japanese had given during the First World War. There was, in fact, an emphasis throughout the visit upon the value of Anglo-American collaboration as a factor in achieving regional harmony rather than as a means of guaranteeing imperial interests in the Pacific. 'The present voyage of the United States Fleet is intended to promote friendship among the nations whose lands border upon the Pacific,' wrote the *Lyttelton Times*, recollecting with gratitude 'splendid services rendered on behalf of the peace of the world by President Wilson and President Harding'.²⁷

25 For an edited (slightly sanitized) account of the Fleet visit to Australia, see Peter M. Sales, 'Going Down Under in 1925', *US Naval Institute Proceedings: History Supplement* (March 1985) pp.45-53. A fascinating anecdotal recollection is provided in the relevant chapters of Robert E. Coontz, *From the Mississippi to the Sea*, Philadelphia, 1930.

26 *The Times*, 12 August 1925, p.11.

27 *Lyttelton Times* (LT), 11 August 1925, p.8.

A respite in the inclement weather allowed a sunny welcome for the US Fleet. The ships were greeted by flotillas of small vessels, as at Wellington, where ferries and motorboats carried hundreds of people out to the heads to view the dramatic scene. Every vantage point on shore was crowded with spectators from Thorndon to Point Jerningham. The warships — which made a grand sight as they neared land — were preceded by six seaplanes. In Auckland, too, the arrival was breathtaking as the battleships emerged from the mists of Hauraki Gulf and moved to their anchorages in the Waitemata. The following day, 2000 sailors marched through the streets of Wellington, banners waving and bands playing, to the great delight of the hordes of children. In Auckland, 80,000 spectators watched a similar parade. 'For once Aucklanders came out of their shells and cheered', the *New Zealand Herald* reported proudly.²⁸

Meanwhile, the arrival of the Americans represented the fruition of much feverish planning in New Zealand. Preparations had been no less painstaking than in Australia, although the expense of the proposed visit had been an early stumbling block which led to some dissension about sharing of expenditures. Despite a prophecy by the *New Zealand Herald* that the US sailors 'will find this Dominion no whit behind the folk across the Tasman in eagerness to show hospitality', this second part of the USN cruise was restrained and cautious by comparison.²⁹ Some of the aloofness of the host nation remained throughout, as if New Zealanders were determined not to match nor outdo the Australian frivolities. The American consul in Auckland graciously suggested that the people of the smaller dominion 'are quieter and it is claimed more British in their attitude'.³⁰

New Zealanders accepted criticism of their reticence with equanimity. 'As a people, we are not readily demonstrative', the *New Zealand Herald* claimed afterwards. '... If that has to be excused, let our insular position, tucked away as we are in a remote corner of earth's least-traversed ocean, plead for us, as well as our lineage in which our guests themselves have a share.' The *Dominion* noted peremptorily that 'it is always necessary to make allowance for local characteristics', but there was a general feeling of relief as 'the barrier of reserve' gradually disappeared during the course of the visit.³¹

Nonetheless, arrangements made by the reception committees in Wellington and Auckland were so demanding that Coontz requested the curtailment of many functions. During the visit to Wellington, a vast number of activities were provided, while Coontz and a large official party went to Rotorua for three days. Robison followed with an even larger group of officers. Napier was another popular destination as all ranks spread out to see as much as they could during shore leave. Meanwhile, Maori representatives came to town to appraise the 'war canoes' of the visitors. Such events were always marked by photographs — sometimes entire illustrated supplements — in the daily newspapers.

28 NZH, 20 August 1925, p.10.

29 *ibid.*, 11 August 1925, p.10.

30 Despatch from the American Consul in Auckland (Walter F. Boyle), 31 August 1925, General Records of the Navy Department, 21513-72, RG 80, NA.

31 NZH, 25 August 1925, 8; and *Dominion*, 17 August 1925, p.8. cf. LT, 18 August 1925, p.7.

In Auckland, an abundance of entertainment was lavished upon the officers, but the provisions made for the men of the lower deck were quite insufficient. Rain and freezing temperatures compounded this unhappy situation. Eventually, after criticism from the press, the various reception committees organized additional hospitality for the sailors so that 'instead of lonely men chilled by the weather and apparent indifference of local people, the visitors are seen everywhere in the company of civilian friends'.³² A souvenir programme listing arrangements and helpful hints was distributed to the men of the Fleet.

A vast range of activities was provided for the visitors. Local branches of the YMCA, the Navy League, church and social groups provided practical assistance, including hot meals and conversion of dockside warehouses into huge dormitories for sailors on leave. Home hospitality began slowly, but increased during the fortnight, as did the availability of private motorists for day tours and general chauffeuring duties. The Automobile Association arranged hundreds of excursions. Virtually all types of sports were organized, too, though boxing matches between locals and bluejackets were judged too volatile and several athletic carnivals were cancelled because of rain. Special race meetings and other sponsored events took place on a daily basis.

The well patronized movie theatres of New Zealand served as a sort of extension to activities, generating and responding to a considerable amount of public fervour. They did a brisk trade during 'Fleet Fortnight'. Newsreels dealing with the warships proved extremely popular, especially for those unable to travel to any of the host ports. For good or ill, US films were major purveyors of American culture and these made up more than 90% of cinema fare. Hoot Gibson's *Out of Luck* was fortuitously being screened during August 1925. This rumbunctious comedy, in which the star played a luckless sailor, had actually been filmed on board USS *California*, then in Auckland harbour.

The warships themselves remained the focus of most interest. They were usually open for inspection on a daily basis, ferry services providing public access to the larger vessels moored in the various waterways. In Auckland, for instance, only the *California* itself was berthed at Prince's Wharf; the other battleships rode at anchor in the channel. A number of functions were held on board. These ranged from the exchange of diplomatic courtesies and official balls, banquets and receptions to less formal concerts and mess-deck dances.

Sightseers flocked to the waterfront, many people travelling from country areas for the occasion. In the two larger cities, as in Australia, the wintry night erupted several times to dramatic searchlight displays. On the all-too-infrequent clear evenings, the stars-and-stripes motif was noticed in the skies. Along with the illumination of the ships, the beams of light created an unusual and exciting display. Day or night, too, there was constant activity in the vicinity of the warships. The marches through city streets by contingents of officers and men resplendent in unfamiliar uniforms were always immensely popular. Flypasts by USN seaplanes or local aircraft were regular and exciting exercises in derring do.

New Zealand crowds at all Fleet-related events were immense, but their

32 *Age* [Melbourne], 17 August 1925, p.9.

behaviour was subdued and during street parades a marked lack of cheering provoked puzzled reactions from the Americans. Only the ubiquitous hordes of children saved the day. They quickly reduced early misunderstanding and bridged the cultural gap with their incessant flag-waving and uninhibited enthusiasm. They did a lot to bring local people and visitors together.

As in Melbourne and Sydney, there was a certain amount of misbehaviour and misadventure among sailors on leave. A seaman was killed in Wellington and another seriously injured in separate accidents. The visitors experienced difficulty with vehicles approaching on the left-hand side of the road. But the most serious contribution to road mishaps, drunkenness and brawling came from strong drink. Availability of liquor became a political issue early in the piece. The New Zealand Alliance and other temperance groups sought to impose a total ban at Fleet functions as part of a blatant effort to generate publicity for a liquor referendum later in the year. As it was, many of the men from 'dry' ships and a country practising prohibition succumbed to the readily proffered temptation of liquid hospitality.

In the main, the welcome given to the American seamen themselves was far from overwhelming. An ugly incident in Christchurch also marred proceedings. During a street parade, the marchers were taunted with questions about who won the war. Tempers flared and later in the day a fight ensued between the visitors and a group of rowdies. Shore leave was cancelled for a couple of days. 'We have no exact knowledge as to where the idea of affronting the invited guests of the nation was conceived', wrote the *Lyttelton Times* with affected coyness, 'but we should not be surprised to hear that a certain political movement which has its spiritual home in Moscow is not unconnected with the notion.'³³

The events in Christchurch were reminiscent of previous First World War agitation in Sydney, along with a strike by seamen in Melbourne manning a ferry hired to take the official government party down to Port Phillip Heads to welcome the Americans. The press indicated that the Christchurch disturbances were provoked by hooligans, but there appeared to be some ideological basis to the protest. Also apparent was an amount of what the *Dominion* described as 'blind racial hatred'. Condemning warships as instruments of a militarism directed against the working class, the Otago Trades and Labour Council boycotted the Fleet visit 'without distinguishing between the naval power of the United States and that of any other nation'.³⁴ The Labour mayor of Christchurch dissociated the conservative faction of his party from such action.

In fact, the New Zealand part of the Fleet cruise was marked by widespread if inconsequential anti-American sentiment. A variety of prejudices joined together to make common cause against the bearers of trans-Pacific manners and mores. Some proletarian resentment was shown against the representatives of new and demoralizing techniques in the workplace; many people still clung to an ill-formed postwar pacifism which viewed naval displays — even by friends — with suspicion; and numerous preachers and an assortment of imperial diehards could be relied upon to seize an opportunity to pontificate against the

33 LT, 15 August 1925, p.8.

34 *Dominion*, 22 August 1925, p.13; and *Otago Daily Times* quoted in *ibid*.

vices of a Sodom-like society which had produced gangsterism, Hollywood, and other excesses. The consul in Auckland dismissed such criticisms as the jealousy of a small minority.³⁵

The racial issue was aired on a number of occasions, too. The *Lyttelton Times* began early, reporting a lengthy speech by Prime Minister Bruce of Australia. 'America is the racial melting pot of the world', he pronounced, 'and it is too early to say what the national standard of the alloy will be.'³⁶ According to Lewis Freeman, an American journalist travelling with the Fleet, Australians remarked on the 'funny foreign faces' of their visitors. A century had passed, he reflected, 'since the mother-stock in America was as pure as is that of Australia and New Zealand today'.³⁷ Later, the people of the smaller dominion also quizzically noted the many Negro sailors in their midst, and singled out the Filipino presence in the Fleet.

Very much as the State Department had feared, most Australasians accepted the visit as akin to a crusade, a mighty effort by the navy of a powerful friend to bring succour to embattled outposts of white civilization. Little that was written or said by sundry commentators who engulfed the occasion in a flood of rhetoric would have led them to believe otherwise. Furthermore, although a variety of topics came under repeated scrutiny, it was the racial question which most extended the plethora of speeches beyond mere platitude. Frequent references were made to alarming increases among the coloured populations of the world, to the splendid achievements of the Anglo-Saxon race, and to the success of exclusionist immigration policies. These statements were not quaint outbursts of insular peoples responding excessively to a friendly gesture. They were expressions of a deeply-felt conviction about imperial development.

The discussion of race took many forms; it remained a potent and omnipresent consideration. One US officer delivered himself of a long and bitter harangue in which he warned his hosts to be very careful about their migration programme. 'You are young enough to profit by the mistakes we made', he declared. 'The United States would be a better country today if we had tightened the immigration laws half-a-century ago.'³⁸ Despite the obviously heterogeneous character of the American visitors, they were hailed as latter-day upholders of the white man's burden. The US might be a nation of great diversity, but Anglo-Saxons were still in charge.

The slightly subdued atmosphere of the New Zealand visit contributed greatly to the objective assessment of the Fleet cruise. Important strategic calculations emerged from discussion of the amicable relations between the British Empire and the United States. Many references were made to the isolated position of the southwest Pacific dominions as 'outposts of Great Britain'. The emergence of the US Navy as a factor in regional affairs was 'less suggestive of rivalry than

35 Despatch from the American consul (Walter F. Boyle), Auckland, 31 August 1925, General Records of the Navy Department, 21513-72, RG 80, NA.

36 LT, 8 August 1925, p.8.

37 NZH, 12 August 1925, p.16.

38 *Dominion*, 12 August 1925, p.6.

of a comradeship in arms if ever the fury of war should trouble this ocean'.³⁹

A number of decorously insipid references were made throughout the visit to the dalliance occurring between men of the Fleet and local women. An anticipatory cartoon in the *New Zealand Herald* had depicted Auckland as a girl sleeping. A popular assumption maintained that relations between the United States and the southwest Pacific dominions could only be strengthened by marital bonds between their citizens. On the other hand, sexual commerce vied with alcohol as the major cause of misbehaviour among shore parties. Prostitutes were not so obvious in New Zealand cities as in Sydney and Melbourne, but information on the location of the few brothels was circulated among the sailors. With the end of the visit, so concluded numerous romances. Dockside partings were an especially sad part of the farewell. 'Many touching scenes were enacted . . .', the *New Zealand Herald* reported. 'Miss Auckland proved herself not nearly so cold-hearted as she looked a fortnight ago, and fervent embraces and promises to write were interchanged.'⁴⁰ Affairs of the heart were probably responsible for most of the stragglers left behind when the ships set course for home.

Retrospective assessments began on the eve of the Fleet's departure, every newspaper and publicist attempting to explain the context of the cruise. Typical was the *Evening Post*, which was prompted to criticize the failure of the Australasian dominions to attend to their defence. 'The result is that the Empire hardly counts as a naval Power in the Pacific just now', it concluded, 'and this dangerous default increases our gratitude to the other great English-speaking Power for the magnificent display of its strength which the cruise of its fleet is now giving to the world.' Neither the first nor the last to make the observation, the newspaper suggested that the United States could guarantee the security of the southwest Pacific by countering to some extent the ineluctable change in the regional balance of power caused by British withdrawal.⁴¹

Some observers evolved a gentler version of this argument, contending that the Pacific was becoming an American ocean and that Britain had been left with supervision of the Atlantic. The *Lyttelton Times* was effusive about the state of affairs: 'In a way the New Zealand visit has been an extra special test of the condition of Anglo-American relations since no part of the Empire, not even the Mother of Empire herself, is so racially pure as New Zealand is. If the Americans can get along with the New Zealanders, and they have proved that they can, then the Anglo-Saxon race has a good sound basis of solidarity in its favour.'⁴² The *Dominion* reflected the consensus among antipodean writers by pointing out 'that in Anglo-American co-operation will be found an assured solution of international problems.'⁴³

Many and varied, then, were the evaluations which streamed forth about the Fleet visit. In Australia, most commentators had clearly not agreed with one

39 NZH, 11 August 1925, p.10; EP, 11 August 1925, p.6; and NZH, 12 August 1925, p.12.

40 *ibid.*, 25 August 1925, p.10.

41 EP, 24 August 1925, p.6.

42 LT, 21 August 1925, p.6.

43 *Dominion*, 24 August 1925, p.8. Cf NZH, 15 August 1925, p.1.

official's private belief that naval visits were a very poor method of improving relations between countries.⁴⁴ 'More than once', the *Argus* noted, 'reference has been made to the advantage which will come to Australia from the better knowledge that the United States will have of us.'⁴⁵ In New Zealand, Coates wrote grandly of the fillip being given to 'brotherhood among the English speaking people'.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, uncertainty lingered about the nature and purpose of the cruise. Congressman James McClintic of the House Naval Affairs Committee, who travelled with the Fleet, constantly denied that it indicated the United States 'was seeking to establish naval pre-eminence in the Pacific.'⁴⁷ In truth, so many shortcomings had been revealed in the facilities of the base at Pearl Harbor — 'Uncle Sam's Storm Door' — and so much had proved beyond the capacity of the Fleet during the voyage to Australasia that a powerful US presence in Far Eastern waters now seemed to rely upon the unlikely event of massive funds being allocated for naval improvements by an unsympathetic Congress. Ironically, the 1925 venture (whatever the hopes held for it in the Navy Department or among the upper echelons of the service) merely confirmed American vulnerability in the western Pacific and failed to give any comfort at all to those who felt that Japanese ambitions could be controlled only by 'the strong right arm' of the US government. Despite public protestations, Coontz himself was highly critical of the Fleet's performance, as revealed in his report on the Australasian cruise and in testimony before a Senate subcommittee in Washington.

Yet this lamentable state of affairs was not guessed at elsewhere. 'The efficiency of this great naval power', a New Zealand journal eulogized, 'is a revelation that throws the light of security on the future of the world in general and of the great Pacific area in particular.'⁴⁸ On the other side of the Tasman, the ingenuousness of Australians in respect of strategic considerations was demonstrated by a popular proposal for a cruise by elements of the RAN to the US west coast 'as a means of cementing the ties of friendship' and as 'a helpful advertisement for Australia'.⁴⁹

But there were some significant underlying reservations about the US visit. A few observers clearly hoped that Washington's lead would galvanize the British government's concern for the security of its possessions in the western Pacific. Rather than simply singing the praises of their American guests, some antipodean critics were actually playing them off against the hope of a Royal Navy presence in Far Eastern waters. Adverse comparisons were made, for example, between the US Fleet and the mighty British Special Service Squadron. Such pugnacity was reminiscent of a similar scheme which allegedly underwrote Alfred Deakin's controversial invitation to the Great White Fleet in 1908.

44 E.L. Piesse, Director of the Pacific Branch of the Prime Minister's Department to Professor George H. Blakeslee, Melbourne, 26 January 1925, Piesse Papers, National Library of Australia.

45 *Argus* (Melbourne), 6 August 1925, p.8.

46 Quoted in Coontz, pp.463-4.

47 Quoted in *Argus*, 24 July 1925, p.12.

48 Quoted in Coontz, p.464.

49 *Argus*, 10 August 1925, p.11.

Certain grand historical lessons were also drawn from the American visit. The people of the southwest Pacific dominions, even as they waxed lyrical about bonds of brotherhood, cousins across the sea, or other forms of familial bond, always reflected with a note of sourness that the United States had, after all, rebelled against Mother England and rejected the advantages offered within the British Empire. What gave particular bite to this esoteric view of Anglo-American relations was that various dominions were weighing their continued membership of this fraternity of nations. In the case of Canada, furthermore, the United States was believed to be playing an active role in developments which could lead to the break up or devolution of the British Empire. So the *Auckland Weekly News*, for example, drew special comfort from the Fleet visit. It drew attention to the loss of the American colonies over a century before, then added: 'And now . . . come America's seamen to exchange courtesies with other oversea lands of British lineage. The hindrance of the eighteenth century has become the highway of the twentieth. And in the intercourse of this friendship there is more than surface amity. In the shrinking world of these days international alliances are less fragile, because more democratic, than of yore; and nowhere in the world is there such a broad basis for a union of peoples as that beneath the fraternity of these two nations speaking one tongue, sharing one literature, and honoring one ideal in law and ethics.'⁵⁰ With such convoluted logic did a number of antipodean commentators seek to forgive the United States for its truancy, allocate for it a task in helping to preserve a *pax Anglo-Americana*, and criticize *en passant* those parts of the British Empire whose delinquency was weakening the imperial bond.

The value of Anglo-American collaboration remained a persistent theme throughout the visit. Captain Francis McCullagh on board the USS *Pennsylvania* spoke frequently about the situation in the Far East, noting that the US was striving to surmount its inferior position there. He deplored talk of war with Japan, but claimed that hostilities were made more likely because of 'a weak and defenceless Hawaii, a garrison under strength . . . and a complete isolation from one another of the white nations of the Pacific'.⁵¹ Journalist John Sandes, travelling with the Fleet, elaborated a similarly aggressive form of racial solidarity. The United States, he decided, would need to harness all its genius and resources to achieve what he regarded as its twin goals — 'the policy of expansion which was laid down when it took over the Philippines . . . and also the policy of controlling its own population, set forth when Congress affirmed its right to exclude foreign nationals'.⁵² There can be no doubt that such a positive message received a warm response in the antipodes.

The cruise to Australasia was more than the fortuitous consequence of the Hawaiian manoeuvres as claimed by the US Navy Department. Not only had consideration of such a venture begun before American entry into the European war, but it also came to be regarded as an important part of testing the Battle Fleet's ability to operate in the western Pacific. The postwar obsession of US strategists remained the need to assess the trans-Pacific progress of an armada

50 Quoted in LD, 10 October 1925, p.21.

51 NZH, 29 July 1925, p.12.

52 *Dominion*, 13 August 1925, p.9.

still without a 'port of arrival' in the Far East. The situation was even worse than the Americans knew. As early as 1920, the Imperial Japanese Navy had obtained full details of War Plan Orange and made their own preparations accordingly.⁵³

Whatever the motives of the 1925 Fleet visit, it sparked fierce controversy from the first public announcement, making nonsense of the official prediction that it would cause no political complications. Perhaps it did not deserve censure as a 'far-flung military gesture', but it should have been examined more closely against the background of regional discord and the diplomatic dangers evaluated accordingly. This the Navy Department refused to do from the outset, tenaciously asserting that 'cruises have always promoted friendships and enhanced the prestige of the United States.'⁵⁴ Confronted by such obduracy, the State Department strove to mitigate the Fleet visit's impact and to lessen the likelihood of injury to the already-strained relations between America and Japan.

Although memories of the Great White Fleet 17 years earlier were constantly evoked, the most important difference went largely ignored. Teddy Roosevelt's nautical messengers called at Auckland while on a circumnavigation which included friends and potential enemies alike. The USN cruise in 1925 was a reunion of former allies in a gesture disclaimed by some as no more than a goodwill exercise, but greeted by others as a recognition of the commonality existing between the English-speaking nations of the Pacific littoral. A decade later, the episode was being used to highlight New Zealand's reliance upon British seapower by drawing attention to the fact that a major naval incursion — whether by friend or foe — could be made into the southwest Pacific.⁵⁵ Whatever the interpretation placed upon events, however, the 1925 visit was a clear indication that the US Battle Fleet had not willingly forfeited the western Pacific to the Imperial Japanese Navy, that American capital ships could deploy in the region, and that the republic would not find itself friendless in the event of a Far Eastern war. These factors were much more important strategically than anything learned as a consequence of the 1908 adventure.

Meanwhile, poor planning by the relevant authorities, several gales, low temperatures, and a series of unfortunate incidents made the New Zealand section of the Australasian cruise less than a spectacular success. Yet it both confirmed and contributed to that vague, uncovenanted sense of trans-Pacific affinity which alarmed sensible heads in London and Washington while infuriating less sympathetic observers in Tokyo. The hands-across-the-sea rhetoric persisted. Potentially embarrassing assumptions were prevalent even in the official farewells. 'We have been most deeply impressed with the evident desire in all quarters to make us feel that we were indeed among people of our own race', Admiral Robison emphasized in his parting message, 'and that the fundamental conception of life, its aspirations and ideals were identical with ours.'⁵⁶

53 H.P. Willmott, *The Barrier and the Javelin: Japanese and Allied Strategies February to June 1942*, Annapolis, Md, 1989, p.18.

54 Curtis Wilbur, Secretary of the Navy, to the National Council for Prevention of War, 27 April 1925, General Records of the Navy Department, 21513-72, RG 80, NA.

55 McGibbon, pp. 266, 281.

56 NZH, 25 August 1925, p.10.

Finally, the four elements of the US Fleet sailed from their respective ports, providing the occasion for much press commentary and numerous last-minute tributes. The weather was unco-operative to the end. The departure from Wellington took place during a heavy rainstorm, but thousands of well-wishers turned out to wave goodbye.

Battleships, cruisers, destroyers and the assortment of support vessels resumed formation at sea, turned northeast for home, and proceeded to American Samoa for a much livelier welcome. From there, they returned in smaller flotillas to various bases in Hawaii, the Canal Zone, and around the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of the US mainland. The visit was frequently recalled in the antipodes during the next few months, then less often for a year or two thereafter. Always remembered, nonetheless, was the message previously carried to Australia and New Zealand in 1908 by Admiral Sperry of the Great White Fleet: 'You need never be afraid so long as the Stars and Stripes float above the seas.'

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