A record number of countries are taking part in RIMPAC 2016

Aloha, RIMPAC!

By Dr. Richard Kelley

RIMPAC, the Rim of the Pacific Exercise hosted by U.S. Pacific Fleet, is the world’s largest international maritime warfare exercise. This year’s RIMPAC, scheduled to run from June 30 through Aug. 4 in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California, is the 25th exercise in the series, which began in 1971, during the Vietnam War.

Themed “Capable, Adaptive, Partners,” RIMPAC 2016 includes 45 ships, five submarines, more than 200 aircraft and 25,000 personnel from 26 nations.

This year’s RIMPAC participants include Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, People’s Republic of China, Peru, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom and the United States. For the first time, Denmark, Germany and Italy are also participating.

The exercise puts participants through their paces in a wide range of capabilities and demonstrates the flexibility of maritime forces in tasks ranging from disaster relief and maritime security operations to sea control and complex warfighting. It aims to bring international participants together to foster and sustain cooperative relationships, building credible, ready naval forces that help prevent conflict and preserve peace.

Hawaii’s Department of Business and Economic Development and Tourism anticipates that, based only on the number of participants and their scheduled time in port, RIMPAC 2016 will inject $52.5 million into Hawaii’s economy. By the end of exercise, once the purchase of supplies, fuel and food and spending by visiting family members and friends of participating personnel are factored in, RIMPAC’s overall economic benefit to the state is expected to be tens of millions of dollars greater than the basic $52.5 million.

Pam Cabrera, Outrigger’s director of military affairs, and Jo Christian, our military reservations coordinator, have been burning the midnight oil securing accommodations for our servicemen and -women visiting Hawaii in connection with RIMPAC.

As regular readers of Saturday Briefing know, Outrigger’s loyalty to servicemen and -women dates back to before the beginning of World War II. Military personnel frequently rented the apartment units that my parents, Outrigger founders Roy and Estelle Kelley, were operating along Seaside Avenue in the center of Waikiki. Roy and Estelle became friends with many of their tenants.

In fact, just a few weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, when I was not quite eight years old, one of those military families invited me to spend the weekend with them in the temporary housing units on Ford Island, in the middle of Pearl Harbor.
I still have a vivid mental video of myself standing on the concrete ramp at the Seaplane Base on Ford Island and watching sailors pull amphibious PBY Catalinas from Pearl Harbor’s waters onto the taxiways and into the hangars for servicing.

Aerial view of Ford Island in 1941, which consisted of a single runway and a seaplane base surrounded by battleships and aircraft carriers

I was lucky not to be on Ford Island a few weeks after my weekend visit there, specifically on Sunday, December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese aircraft.

Early that morning, my father drove me and my sisters, Jean and Pat, to Sunday school at St. Clement’s Church a few miles from our home in Waikiki. He then headed back home to have breakfast with two of our military tenants, Commander John Shultz and his wife, Martha. Because of the attack, my mother never got to serve breakfast that fateful morning. Commander Shultz bolted out of our home and dashed off to war wearing his full dress white Navy uniform while my father drove back to St. Clement’s at high speed to pick up his three children. (See my article Honoring those who served: http://goo.gl/TSKm5W.)

RIMPAC exercises always stir these memories for me, and I am proud to join everyone at Outrigger in continually recognizing and supporting the men and women of the armed forces in the U.S. and every other free country where our company does business.

So over the next few weeks, our hotels and the streets will be filled with sailors wearing different uniforms and speaking languages that may sound unfamiliar. One thing we all share and understand, though, is a smile, and I’d venture to say that combined with an “Aloha,” the sincere and heartfelt hospitality we share will be understood and appreciated by these men and woman who make sacrifices for our freedoms. Aloha, RIMPAC!

PS: I hope participants in RIMPAC will take some time, when on shore leave, to see these and many other photos documenting the development of aviation in Hawai‘i and the Pacific by visiting the Pacific Aviation Museum. Located – quite coincidentally and, I believe, fortuitously – on Ford Island, the museum has a wealth of photos and historical displays that I’m confident will be of interest to all.