RIMPAC 2014 Is REALLY BIG!
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Mildred Courtney and our ‘ohana in the Military Liaison Office are working nearly around the clock trying to find accommodations and provide services for the servicemen and -women who are visiting Hawai‘i in connection with the biggest-ever RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) exercise, which started this past Thursday (June 26) and will continue for five weeks, through August 1, in the waters and the skies off and above Hawai‘i.

RIMPAC is the world’s largest international naval exercise, held primarily in July and August of even-numbered years. It is hosted and administered by the U.S. Pacific Fleet and will be led by Vice Adm. Kenneth Floyd, commander of the U.S. Third Fleet (one of the Pacific Fleet’s major commands). The goal is to “foster and sustain cooperative relationships that are critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world’s oceans.” According to the Third Fleet Public Affairs Office, the theme of RIMPAC 2014 is “Capable, Adaptive, Partners.” The participants will conduct a series of exercises ranging from war games to humanitarian relief operations.

This year’s RIMPAC exercise, the 24th in the series that began in 1971 during the Vietnam War, is setting records in several ways.

- It is the largest ever, with 23 nations involved, as compared to 14 nations as recently as 2010 and only five nations in 1971.
- For the first time, Norway, Brunei and the People’s Republic of China will participate in RIMPAC.
- Also for the first time at RIMPAC, two hospital ships will participate, one of them from China.
- One notable absentee: Russia, which participated in RIMPAC for the first and, so far, only time in 2012. Its absence this year would appear to be fallout from international condemnation of its aggression against Ukraine. Interestingly, China, which has been behaving aggressively toward India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam, and which has challenged U.S. Navy vessels in waters off East Asia, is nonetheless among this year’s RIMPAC participants.

Non-U.S. officers will command many of the important components of the combined task force during the exercise. Rear Admiral Simon Cullen of the Royal Australian Navy will serve as deputy commander of the exercise and Rear Admiral Yasuki Nakahata of the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force will serve as Vice Commander. Rear Admiral Gilles Couturier of the Royal Canadian Navy will command the maritime component, while Air Commodore Chris Westwood of the Royal Australian Air Force will command the air component.

The exercise will test a wide range of capabilities ranging from disaster relief and maritime security operations to sea control and complex warfighting, including amphibious operations, missile, anti-submarine and air-defense exercises as well as counter-piracy, mine clearance and salvage operations, according to U.S. Navy sources.
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RIMPAC’s economic impact on Hawai’i will be significant and widespread but not easy to fully measure. In the area of tourism, Outrigger president & CEO David Carey – who was honored just over two weeks ago with the “Spirit of the Warrior Award” for his outstanding contributions as chairman of the Military Affairs Council of the Chamber of Commerce of Hawai’i – has said, “RIMPAC’s economic impact on Hawai’i is significant and widespread but difficult to measure.

For Outrigger, we are delighted to welcome RIMPAC participants who may also enjoy shore leave in Waikīkī or check out a neighbor island. It’s great exposure and likely some of them will be back again someday, perhaps with family.”

To learn more about RIMPAC activities and participants, visit www.cpf.navy.mil/rimpac/2014.

So, for the next five weeks, the lights in our Military Liaison Office in Waikiki will be burning bright late at night and again early in the morning as Mildred Courtney and her staff try to accommodate the needs of our servicemen and -women, as well as those visiting from 22 other countries. They are currently occupying approximately 1,400 Outrigger and OHANA rooms in Waikiki! And in our lobbies, restaurants, shops and corridors you may hear some visitors speaking with accents and in languages that are unfamiliar to your ears – perhaps even Norwegian or Malay. If you do, just smile and say, “Aloha.” They’ll understand perfectly, for that is the international language of welcome and hospitality understood all around the Pacific Rim!