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Pearl Harbor Maintains High Operations Tempo, Recognizes Strategic Importance

By Bill Doughty, Commander Navy Region Hawaii Public Affairs

PEARL HARBOR (NNS) -- As Hawaii bid farewell to USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), June 10 following a brief port visit, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) Port Operations continues to be busy with the largest group of visitors since last summer's Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise.

Among the visitors are two Australian navy ships – HMAS Perth and HMAS Sydney – that routinely operate with U.S. Pacific Fleet. Perth is the newest ship of the Australian navy, Sydney is the oldest.

International partners and allies train routinely with the U.S. Navy in Hawaiian waters, including at the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai.

"The busy [operations] tempo both here at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and at the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai, highlights how vital Hawaii is, not only for our own national security but also for our friends and allies who help us maintain stability throughout the region," said Commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific Rear Adm. Dixon R. Smith.

"We train, equip, refuel and support the fleet, as well as visiting ships and partners, in order to help them meet their responsibilities," Smith added. "They know they are welcomed, with Aloha, here in Hawaii."

Among visitors to JBPHH is Military Sealift Command's USNS Henry J. Kaiser (T-AO 187), lead ship in the T-AO class of underway replenishment oilers. The ship is named after Henry J. Kaiser, a pioneer in the shipbuilding industry with strong ties to Hawaii who built the Hilton Hawaiian Village and the Hawaii Kai area of Honolulu.

A second Military Sealift Command ship, the Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS Charles Drew (T-AKE-10), is also visiting JBPHH. Named after an African-American pioneer in blood storage and management, the ship will mark the end of its first year of service in July.

Other visitors this week included USS Gridley (DDG 101), USS Stockdale (DDG 106) and USS Bunker Hill (CG 52).

Many of the 11 homeported ships and 18 submarines of Commander, U.S. Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific and Commander, Submarine Force U.S. Pacific Fleet are also in port.

According to JBP HH's operations officer, Cmdr. Colin Caswell, "We are busy, yes, but we always keep safety and security as top priorities. It's a privilege to take care of these ships and their crews."

Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Hawaii's largest industrial employer, takes care of the maintenance of the fleet and keeps ships and submarines "fit to fight." Afloat Training Group Middle Pacific conducts training routinely and Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit One divers and other authorized divers operate in and around Pearl Harbor.

Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam also supports U.S. Coast Guard vessels, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and various research ships. Each year, approximately 1.4 million visitors take Navy-operated, renewable energy-fueled boats from the National Park Service's Pearl Harbor Visitor Center to visit the USS Arizona Memorial.

The busy tempo in Pearl Harbor, coupled with the nine maritime patrol aircraft and 10 helicopters operating out of Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe, provides a boost to the local economy. Sailors, DoD civilians, families and visiting family members and friends are eager to see the islands, sample the hospitality and learn about the culture of Hawaii.

In a published press release June 1, a Rand study reported, "DoD expenditures in Hawaii during FY 2007-2009 averaged \$6.5 billion per year in 2009 dollars - \$4.1 billion for personnel and \$2.4 billion for procurement. These expenditures were associated with \$12.2 billion worth of Hawaii's output - 18 percent of Hawaii's 2009 GDP - and 101,000 jobs."

<http://www.rand.org/news/press/2011/06/01.html>

Hawaii, strategically located in the middle of the Pacific, plays a key role in the Navy's Maritime Strategy in deterring aggression, preventing war and promoting peace.

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