Kiwis Ask: “Hey, Where Is Everybody?”

By KIRK SPITZER | July 5, 2012 | 80

Guided-missile frigate USS Crommelin at Honolulu Harbor, where two New Zealand warships are berthed for the RIMPAC 2012 exercise; at rear is Aloha Tower.

TOKYO – In a gesture of friendship and goodwill toward an obscure former ally, warships from New Zealand have been granted special, private berthing privileges for a major naval exercise now underway in Hawaii. And wouldn’t you know it: they’re complaining. It seems that while ships from a dozen friendly countries are berthed at crowded, attack-prone Pearl Harbor, two New Zealand warships have been assigned exclusive berthing spots at Honolulu’s lovely civilian harbor, several miles away. All by themselves.

This is the first time that New Zealand forces have been invited to take part in the biennial RIMPAC exercises since New Zealand banned U.S. Navy ships from making port calls there in the 1980s. U.S. warships are still not welcome. Sensitive Kiwis detect a deliberate snub in the separate berthing arrangements in Hawaii.

“Petty, petulant and pathetic,” says the New Zealand Herald. “What other conclusion is it possible to draw from the absurd, vindictive and ultimately short-sighted refusal by the United States to allow two New Zealand naval vessels to berth at the Pearl Harbor military base?”

A quarter of poll respondents said New Zealand should pull out of the exercise because of the “petty snub.”

Well, sure, but it could be worse. The Kiwis’ temporary home is at the foot of historic Aloha Tower, a short walk from shopping, restaurants, bars and the kind of nighttime, personal-service entertainment long favored by seagoing personnel. The beaches and discos of Waikiki are a quick bus ride away.

Pearl Harbor, on the other hand, is in a different realm. It’s surrounded by guards and barbed wire. Since there are not enough piers to go around, many visiting vessels will tie up side-by-side; no privacy, lots of gangplanks. Water-buses and shuttles are needed to navigate the sprawling facility (Hey, is that a golf course?), and it takes an hour or more to fight traffic to reach town.

Recall, too, that it was only 70 years ago that hundreds of warplanes attacked the base on a peaceful Sunday morning. Three