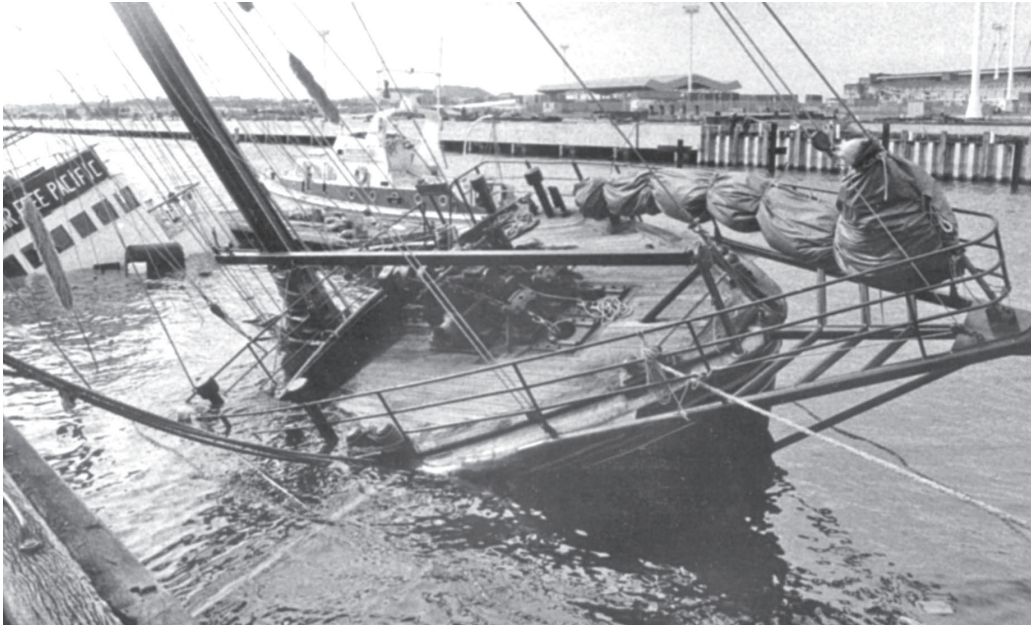


REVISITING FRENCH TERRORISM IN THE PACIFIC

Rainbow Warrior bombing

France's sabotage of the Rainbow Warrior more than two decades ago hogged newspaper headlines during the anniversary last year. But little coverage was given to the actual cause of the bombing – nuclear testing in the South Pacific and the impact on Pacific Islanders. The Rongelapese and Tahitians still suffer from the legacy of decades of American and French nuclear tests. **DAVID ROBIE** looks at the hypocrisy behind this sordid act of state terrorism in a New Zealand port.



The Rainbow Warrior at Marsden Wharf after the bombing.
Photo Gil Hanly

leading nuclear-free and pro-independence politician, Oscar Manutahi Temaru, would emerge as the territory's new president, ushering in a refreshing "new order" with a commitment to pan-Pacific relations. Although independence is nominally off the agenda for the moment, far-reaching changes in the region are inevitable and Temaru rattled Paris in March 2006 when he made a speech in the Cook Islands openly advocating independence for Tahiti Nui.

FRANCE AS TERRORIST COUNTRY

But traditional Gallic military arrogance was again exposed in January this year (2006) when President Jacques Chirac threatened to use nuclear weapons against any country that carried out a state-sponsored terrorist attack against it. During his missile-rattling defence of the 3 billion euros-a-year nuclear strike force, he said the target was not "fanatical terrorists" but states that used "terrorist means" or "weapons of mass destruction" against France. The irony seemed lost on Chirac that the only example ever of state-backed terrorism against New Zealand, aptly called Operation Satanic, was committed by the French secret service on 10 July 1985. The attack was initially covered up with a litany of lies, and the hypocrisy of the other Western nuclear powers, Britain and the United States, over the bombing of a peaceful ship in New Zealand waters and the murder of an environmental photographer was breathtaking.

Chirac's missile bluster, made at

The irony seemed lost on Chirac that the only example ever of state-backed terrorism against New Zealand... was committed by the French secret service on 10 July 1985

A YEAR after *Eyes of Fire* was originally published, in January 1987 and two months before the Fiji military coup, I was arrested at gunpoint by French troops near the New Caledonian village of Canala. The arrest followed a week of being tailed by secret agents in Noumea. When I was handed over by the military to local gendarmerie for interrogation, accusations of my being a "spy" and questions over my book on the Rainbow Warrior bombing were made in the same breath. But after about four hours of questioning I was released.

This paranoid drama over my reporting of the militarisation of East Coast villages in an attempt by French authorities to harass and suppress supporters of Kanak independence featured on the front page of the New Zealand *Sunday Times* and *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes in Noumea*. It was also covered by a regional Pacific news magazine.

When Marie-Thérèse and Bengt Danielsson's then 22-year-old damning indictment of French nuclear colonialism, *Moruroa, Mon Amour*, was republished in 1986 with new sections under the title *Poisoned Reign*, French intransigence over nuclear testing and demands for independence in Tahiti was at a peak. It seemed unlikely in 1986 that in less than two decades, nuclear testing would be finally abandoned in the South Pacific, and Tahiti's

a naval base near Brest, to the crew of one of four nuclear submarines that carry almost 90 percent of France's nuclear warheads, came a few months after documents published in France showed the Rainbow Warrior attack was made with the "personal authorisation" of the late President François Mitterrand.

A *Le Monde* newspaper article on 10 July 2005, published extracts from a 1986 account written by Admiral Pierre Lacoste, former head of France's DGSE secret service. He said he had asked the president for permission to embark on a plan to "neutralise" the Rainbow Warrior and would never have gone ahead without his authorisation. Mitterrand's alleged ultimate responsibility is hardly any surprise.

After being awarded \$8 million in compensation from France by the International Arbitration Tribunal for the attack, Greenpeace finally towed the Rainbow Warrior to Matauri Bay and scuttled her off Motutapere, in the Cavalli Islands, on 12 December 1987 to create a living reef. Her namesake, Rainbow Warrior II, formerly, the Grampion Fame, was launched in Hamburg four years to the day after the bombing, on 10 July 1989. On 15 July 1990, a memorial was unveiled at Matauri Bay featuring an arched creation by Kerikeri sculptor Chris Booth – incorporating the bombed ship's brass propeller.

An earlier compensation deal for New Zealand, mediated in 1986 by United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, awarded the Government \$13 million (US\$7 million). The money was used for a nuclear-free projects fund and the Pacific Development and Conservation Trust. The agreement included an apology by France and the deportation of jailed secret agents Alain Mafart and Dominique Prieur after they had served less than a year of their 10-year sentences for manslaughter and wilful damage of the bombed ship. They were transferred from New Zealand to Hao Atoll in French Polynesia to serve

three years in exile at a "Club Med"-style nuclear and military base.

But the bombing scandal did not end there. The same day as the scuttling of the Rainbow Warrior in 1987, the French Government told New Zealand that Major Mafart had a "serious stomach complaint." French authorities repatriated him back to France in defiance of the terms of the United Nations agreement and protests from the Lange Government.

HONOURING THE TERRORISTS

It was later claimed by a Tahitian newspaper, *Les Nouvelles*, that French spy-terrorist, Mafart was smuggled out of Tahiti on a false passport hours before New Zealand was even told of the "illness." Mafart reportedly assumed the identity of a carpenter, Serge Quillan. Captain Prieur was also repatriated back to France in May 1988 because she was pregnant. France ignored the protests by New Zealand and the secret agent pair were honoured, decorated and promoted in their homeland. It's supreme irony such an act of terrorism should be so honoured in this age of a so-called "war on terrorism."

In 2005, the French agents' lawyer, Gerard Currie, tried to block footage of their guilty pleas in court, shown on closed circuit tv to journalists at the time but not seen publicly.

Television New Zealand's current affairs programme *Sunday* wanted to use the footage. Losing the High Court ruling in May 2005, the two former agents appealed against the footage being broadcast. But they had lost any spurious claims to privacy over the act of terrorism by publishing their own memoirs – *Agent Secrète* (Prieur, 1995) and *Carnets Secrets* (Mafart, 1999), so their guilty pleas were publicly broadcast in New Zealand.

The Danielssons highlighted a public opinion poll by the SOFRES institute three months after the Rainbow Warrior bombing to gauge what French people thought of the "Blunderwatergate" scandal. While no questions in the poll directly raised the social or health implications for the Polynesian people, sixty percent were found to approve French nuclear testing (as long as they were in Polynesia, well away from France).

documents published in France showed the Rainbow Warrior attack was made with the "personal authorization" of the late President François Mitterrand

Photographer Fernandez Pereira with Rongelap Islander Bonemej Namwe during the Rainbow Warrior's Marshall Islands voyage in May 1985.
Photo: David Robie



FRENCH REFERENDUM EXCLUDES POLYNESIAN VIEWS

“This represents a national consensus,” we are told, which should be respected by all peoples in the Pacific,” noted the Danielssons. *“So far, no French politician or editorialist has cared to mention the embarrassing fact that political, civic and church leaders in French Polynesia have for years been asking the French Government to organise a local referendum so as to allow the people most concerned, the islanders themselves, to decide the issue.”*

The Danielssons were an inspiration to nuclear-free and independent Pacific campaigners, especially in the Cook Islands and Tahiti. Along with Elaine Shaw of Greenpeace New Zealand, they played a vital role in raising public awareness of the issues. Swedish-born Dr Danielsson was director of his homeland’s National Museum of Ethnology. In 1947, he joined Thor Heyerdahl’s epic Kon Tiki balsa

raft voyage across the eastern Pacific Ocean that made a crash-landing on the atoll of Raroia. He married Marie-Thérèse, a French national, in 1948 and they made their home in Tahiti. She was very active in local politics and women’s environmental organisations. She was also the founder of Moruroa e Tatou (Moruroa and Us), a nuclear veterans’ association.

While the Danielssons published several scientific studies and popular books on the islands, they constantly campaigned to expose French nuclear colonialism. The couple were honoured for their commitment and achievements with the Right Livelihood Award, an alternative Nobel Peace Prize-style international recognition. However, Danielsson’s health deteriorated after this honour and he died in July 1997, barely a year after French nuclear testing in the Gambiers had finally ended.

FRANCE IGNORED PROTESTS BY NEW ZEALAND AND THE SECRET AGENT TERRORIST PAIR WERE HONOURED, DECORATED AND PROMOTED IN THEIR HOMELAND

nuclear tests for three decades. But she too died in 2003.

Elaine Shaw worked for Greenpeace New Zealand for 16 years and developed it into the small, lively movement it became by the time of the bombing. But she was not comfortable with the changes and rapid growth of the organisation after the bombing. She worked tirelessly for the people of Rongelap as well as French Polynesia, the victims of nuclear testing. She continued working for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific until 1990 and then decided to

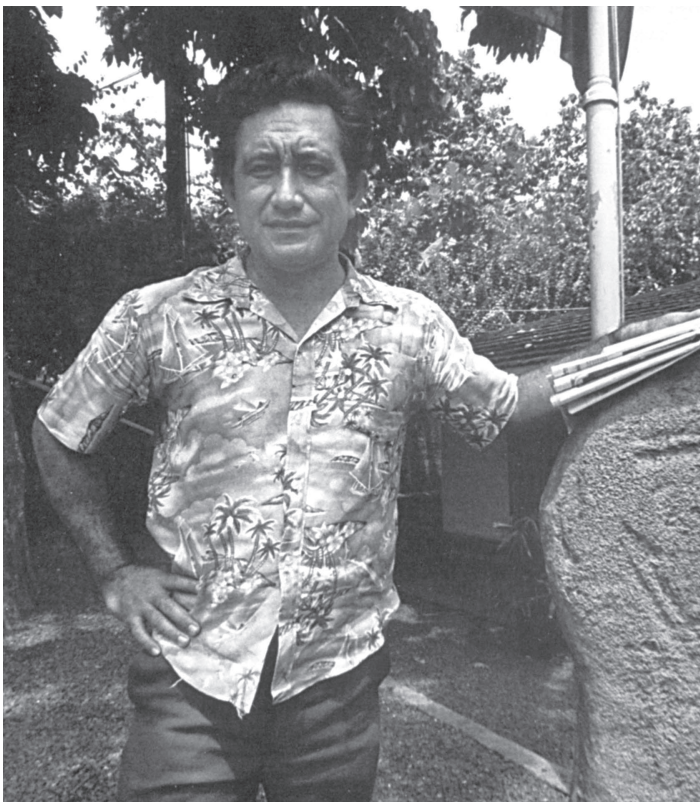
take a well-earned break, travelling overland in Australia. But Elaine soon found herself back in the fray, this time as a Greenpeace canvasser. Tragically, she died from cancer in October that year. “I sensed her interest stemmed from her concern for the people rather than any political ideology,” said Tahitian activist Téa Hirshon and now parliamentarian. “She went to many islands and saw for herself what people in the Pacific wanted.”

Other Greenpeace stalwarts too have died since the Rainbow Warrior bombing, including “*Warrior of the Rainbow*” author and journalist Bob Hunter, founding president of Greenpeace (2005), and David McTaggart (2004), for many years the inspirational chairman of Greenpeace International.

In mid-2005 came news of the deaths of two remarkable South Pacific people. Internationally respected New Zealand peace and military communications researcher Owen Wilkes, who joined a Vega voyage to the Cook Islands in mid-1986, and Fijian nuclear-free and independent Pacific campaigner Amelia Rokotuivuna. Wilkes inspired a generation of peace and anti-nuclear activists through his dedicated research and no-nonsense practical solutions. He was an architect of the now mainstream view New Zealanders have of their place in

PROTESTS FORCE FRANCE TO END PACIFIC NUCLEAR TESTING

France had agreed to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty after a final swansong package of eight planned nuclear tests to provide data for simulation computer software. But such was the strength of international hostility and protests and riots in Pape’ete that Paris ended the programme prematurely after just six tests. France officially ratified the treaty on 10 September 1996. Marie-Thérèse continued in the struggle to “help Polynesians to find the right way to a fair and rational independence” and to continue documentation of the harm caused by French



Mayor Oscar Manutahi Temaru. Temaru supported the nuclear-free protests off Moruroa and greeted the Greenpeace at sea.
Photo David Robie

the world as a nuclear-free Pacific country.

Rokotuivuna, a tireless and courageous advocate of social justice in the Pacific, was a trustee of the DAWN Pacific women's movement in Fiji at the time of her death. Longtime friend, activist and academic Claire Slatter described her as "a commanding public speaker, brilliant in rallies."

But the best possible memorial for Elaine, Amelia, Owen, the Danielssons and other Pacific campaigners came in late 2004, when Tahitians elected Oscar Temaru as their territorial president. He established the first nuclear-free municipality in the Pacific Islands when he was mayor of the Pape'ete airport suburb of Faa'a. Having ousted the conservative incumbent for the past two decades, Gaston Flosse, the man who gave Mafart and Prieur a hero's welcome to Tahiti, Temaru lost office just four months later. He was reinstated to power in early 2005 after a by-election confirmed his overwhelming support. Since the Temaru coalition came to power, demands increased for a full commission of inquiry to investigate new evidence of radiation exposure in the atmospheric nuclear tests in the Gambiers between 1966 and 1974.

Altogether France detonated 193 of a total of 210 nuclear tests in the South Pacific, 46 of them dumping more than nine megatons of explosive energy in the atmosphere – 42 over Moruroa and four over Fangataufa atolls. That champion of nuclear tests, former territorial president Gaston Flosse, lost a legal challenge trying to block an investigation.

The Green Party leader in Tahiti, Jacky Bryant, accused the French Defence Ministry of having "contempt" for the people of Polynesia. Replying to ministry denials in May 2005, claiming stringent safety and health precautions, he said: "It's necessary to stop saying the Tahitians don't understand anything about these kinds of questions – they must stop this kind of behaviour from

another epoch." Bryant compared the French ministry's reaction with the secretive and arrogant approach of China and Russia. In contrast, Britain and the United States had reluctantly: "recognised the consequences of nuclear tests on the populations" in Australia, Christmas Island, the Marshall Islands and Rongelap. As part of the Compact of Free Association, the U.S. provided \$150 million to establish a nuclear claims tribunal to deal with Marshallese claims. The U.S. also provided \$60 million to the Rongelap people to "clean up" their atoll and provide for resettlement. But the islanders are seeking an adjustment for the U.S. to also take responsibility for ongoing health problems.

PRESSURE MOUNTS FOR COMPENSATION FROM FRANCE

The Tahitian commission of inquiry report was finally tabled in the Territorial Assembly in Papeete on 9 February 2006. It condemned French governments for having covered up for more than four decades the fact that the main populated island of Tahiti, 1200 km north-west of Moruroa and Fangataufa, had been dusted by repeated fallout from

the atmospheric nuclear tests. The pressure on France over compensation for the victims of nuclear testing will continue. The sordid Rainbow Warrior affair was a diplomatic debacle for the French, especially in the South Pacific, and it still continues to haunt Paris in spite of its efforts to recover some mana in the region.

Greenpeace and the environmental movement have grown dramatically and matured over the past two decades. Campaigns have been broadened into newer pressing issues such as climate change, driftnet fisheries, genetic engineering, glacier retreat and the illegal rainforest timber trade. Now perhaps Elaine Shaw and the Danielssons legacy will finally include Tahitians winning some compensation for being poisoned like the Rongelapese. The original Rainbow Warrior's last voyage and the death of Fernando Pereira were not in vain.

This article is an adapted extract from David Robie's new and revised memorial edition of his book *Eyes of Fire: The Last Voyage of the Rainbow Warrior*. It is available from good bookshops or order direct from South Pacific Books Ltd: \$39.95 www.southpacificbooks.co.nz

Since the Temaru coalition came to power, demands increased for a full commission of inquiry to investigate new evidence of radiation exposure in the atmospheric nuclear tests in the Gambiers



Rongelap Islanders on board the *Rainbow Warrior* bound for Mejato Photo David Robie