



You can't sink a rainbow

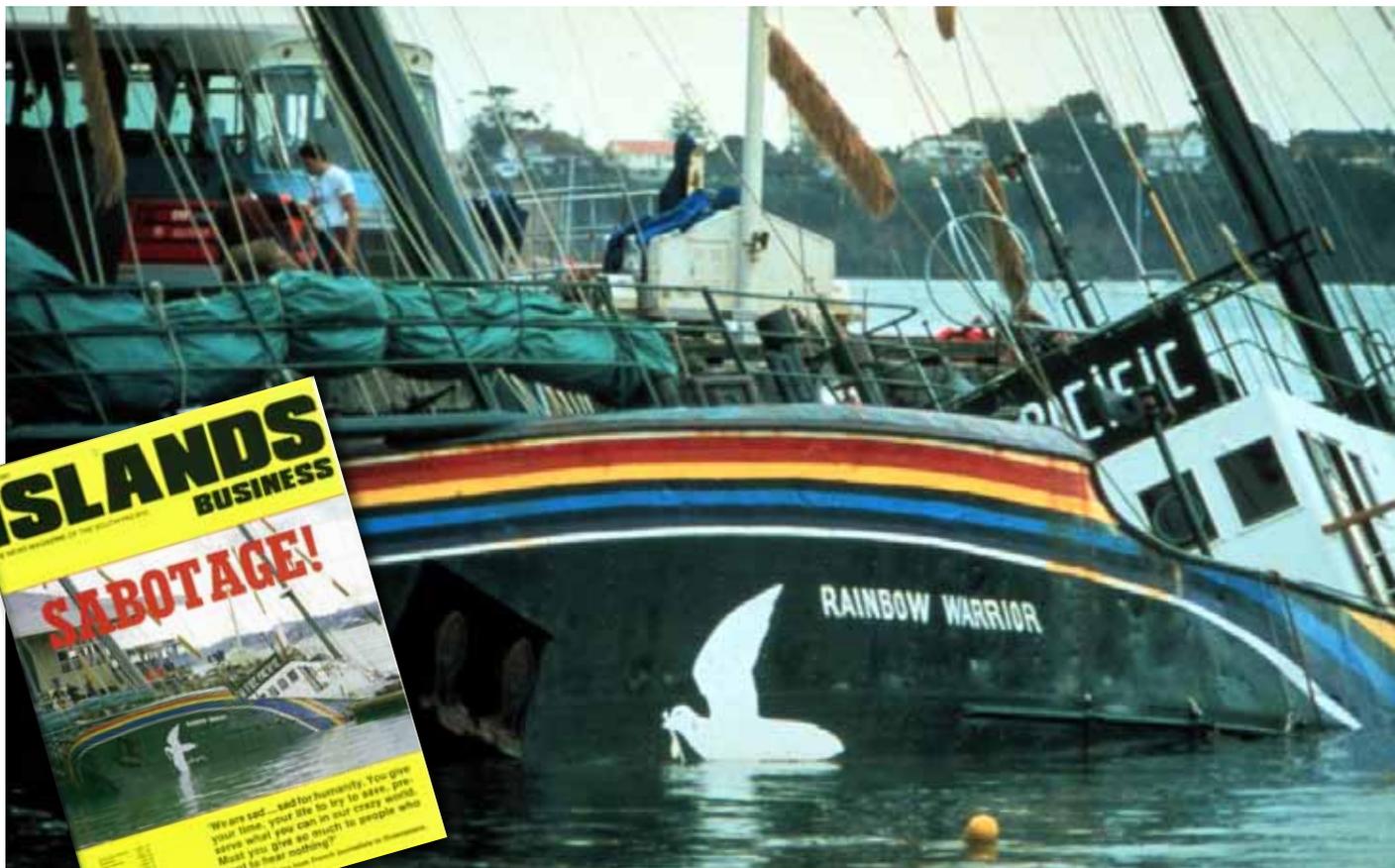
By **DAVID ROBIE**

A year after *Eyes of Fire* was first published, in January 1987 – four months before the Fiji military coups, I was arrested at gunpoint by French troops near the New Caledonian village of Canala.

The arrest followed a week of me 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 then that in less than two decades, nuclear



Rainbow Warrior on the morning after the bombing in Auckland. Inset: The cover of *Islands Business* featuring David Robies' story in the August 1985.

testing would be finally abandoned in the South Pacific – and Tahiti's leading nuclear-free and pro-independence politician, Oscar Manutahi Temaru, would emerge as the territory's new president four times and usher 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.

After being awarded \$8 million in compensation from France by the International Arbitration Tribunal, 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, the second *Rainbow Warrior*, formerly the *Grampion Fame*, was launched in Hamburg four years to the day after the bombing, on 10 July 1989. And 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.

However, the decision to scuttle the first *Rainbow Warrior* has angered skipper Peter Wilcox to this day. Just seven months earlier, at the time of arbitration hearings in Geneva in May 1987, Greenpeace International's David McTaggart had told Willcox that he was going to get a cheque in a few months to fix up the *Warrior* 'any way you want', Willcox recalls. He was shocked when told the Greenpeace International board had voted to sink the ship, which had been 'floating patiently in Auckland Harbour for two years'.

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 an anti-nuclear 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'. The French authorities repatriated him back to France in defiance of the terms of the United Nations agreement and protests from the Lange Government.

It was later claimed by a Tahitian newspaper, *Les Nouvelles*, that 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. A supreme irony that such an act of state terrorism should be rewarded in this age of a so-called 'war on terrorism'.

In 2005, their lawyer, Gerard Currie, tried to block footage of their guilty pleas in court – shown on closed circuit to journalists at the time but not previously seen publicly – from being broadcast by the Television New Zealand current affairs programme Sunday. Losing the High Court ruling in May 2005, the two former agents appealed against the footage being broadcast. They failed and the footage was finally broadcast by Television New Zealand on 7 August 2006 – almost two decades later. They had lost any spurious claim to privacy over the act of terrorism by publishing their own memoirs – *Agent Secrète* and *Carnets Secrets*. Mafart recalled in his book how the international media were dumbfounded that the expected huge High Court trial had 'evaporated before their eyes', describing his courtroom experience: 'I had an impression of being a mutineer from the Bounty ... but in this case the gallows would not be erected in the village square. Three courteous phrases were exchanged between [the judge] and our lawyers, the charges were read to us and the court asked us whether we pleaded guilty or not guilty. Our replies were clear: 'Guilty!' With that one word the trial was at an end.'

Ironically, Mafart much later became a wildlife photographer, under the moniker Alain Mafart-Renodier, and filed his pictures through the Paris-based agency Bios with a New York office. Greenpeace US engaged an advertising agency to produce the 2015 environmental calendar illustrated with wildlife images. As Greenpeace chronicler and photojournalist Pierre Gleizes describes it: 'Incredibly bad luck, out of millions, the agency bought one of Alain Mafart's pictures to illustrate a Greenpeace calendar.

Fortunately, someone saw that before it got distributed. So Mafart got his fee but 40,000 calendars were destroyed.'

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, 60 per cent were found to approve of French nuclear testing (as long as they were in Polynesia, well away from France).

'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 the nuclear-free and independent Pacific movement, 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 ended finally. 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 Papeète 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 nuclear tests for three decades. But she too died in 2003.

Elaine Shaw worked for Greenpeace New Zealand for 16 years and developed it with an Auckland core group into the small but lively movement it had become 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. Shaw soon found herself back in the fray, this time as a Greenpeace canvasser. Tragically, she died from cancer in October that year. 'I sensed that her interest stemmed from her concern for the people rather than any political ideology,' said Tahitian activist Téa Hirshon. 'She went to many islands and saw for herself what people in the Pacific wanted.' Bunny McDiarmid, a deckhand on board the bombed ship, is now executive director of Greenpeace New Zealand and providing inspired contemporary leadership after a lifetime of commitment to Greenpeace and also to the people of Rongelap – she lived for three months with the islanders who had taken refuge on Mejato Island. As she says: 'Once you've seen the effects of nuclear testing with your own eyes, you can't pretend it

doesn't exist – you've got to do something about it.'

Other Greenpeace stalwarts too have died since the Rainbow Warrior bombing and the first edition of *Eyes of Fire*, including *Warrior of the Rainbow* author and journalist Bob Hunter (2005), founding president of Greenpeace; and David McTaggart (2004), for many years the inspirational chairman of Greenpeace International. And in mid-2005 news came of the deaths of remarkable and internationally respected New Zealand peace and military communications researcher Owen Wilkes, who had joined a Vega voyage to the Cook Islands in mid-1986, and Fijian nuclear free and independent Pacific campaigner Amelia Rokotui-vuna.

A tireless and courageous advocate of social justice in the Pacific, Rokotui-vuna 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'.

In 2013, Marshall Islands Journal editor Giff Johnson published his biography *Don't Ever Whisper* about his charismatic wife Darlene Keju Johnson and her life campaigning for justice and the health of her fellow Marshall Islanders over nuclear testing until she died from cancer in 1996 – the year French nuclear testing ended. Johnson wrote: 'Darlene's message to us, clear in life as well as in death: Don't be afraid to make your way through strong ocean currents to get to the next island.'

An encouraging memorial for Elaine, Amelia, Owen, the Danielssons and other Pacific campaigners came in 2004 when Tahitians elected Oscar Temaru as their territorial president. He had established the first nuclear-free municipality in the Pacific Islands when he was mayor of the Papeete 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 byelection confirmed his overwhelm-

ing support. But since then Temaru has won and lost office twice more, most recently in 2013, and Flosse is fighting ongoing corruption charges.

Since the Temaru coalition first came to power, demands have 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. Ironically, even that champion of nuclear tests, former territorial president Gaston Flosse, has now swung his voice in support of the call for the inquiry. 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 that 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. However, 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. In 2009, the French National Assembly finally passed nuclear care and compensation legislation, known as the Morin law after Defence Minister Hervé Morin who initiated it. It has been consistently criticised as far too restrictive and of little real benefit to Polynesians.

In 2013, Flosse scrapped the *Délégation pour le suivi des essais nucléaires* (Nuclear Tests Monitoring Office) in Tahiti led by researcher Bruno Barri- lot. The same year, in July, declassified French defence documents exposed that the nuclear tests were 'far more toxic' than had been previously acknowledged. *Le Parisien* reported that the papers 'lifted the lid on one of the biggest secrets of the French army'. It

said that the documents indicated that on 17 July 1974, a test had exposed the main island of Tahiti, and the nearby tourist resort isle of Bora Bora, to plutonium fallout 500 times the maximum level.

The political fallout from the Rainbow Warrior affair carries on three decades later. After publication of the 2005 edition of this book, I was interviewed by Democracy Now's Amy Goodman in the US about revelations in *Le Monde* that the late President Mitterrand had personally approved Operation Satanique to take out the Rainbow Warrior. In 2006, a report in *Le Parisien* cited then Socialist presidential candidate Segolene Royal's younger brother Antoine as having claimed his elder sibling, former DGSE agent Gérard Royal, had told him he had been a member of the third spy team that planted the bombs. Fernando Pereira's daughter Marelle pleaded in a New Zealand Herald interview for the Government to reverse a decision to not pursue extradition. As did Greenpeace. However, Agence France-Presse news agency reported that he was the Zodiac driver and not suspected of planting the bombs. Sengolene Royal laughed off the incident as a political smear campaign, adding she didn't know whether it was a French politics 'banana skin'. In 2012, independent French actor/director Mathieu Kassovitz made the controversial film *Rebellion* about the extraordinarily heavy response by the military to the Kanak pro-independence protests of the mid-1980s, known as Les Événements, in New Caledonia, New Zealand's closest Pacific neighbour. The callous brutality of the period shows how the prevailing political mind-set in Paris enabled the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing to go ahead.

As this book was going to press, the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was in session at the United Nations in New York in May 2015. But the relatively low-key Pacific presence was no indicator of a drop in regional concern over 'nuclearism'. The US-Soviet rivalry at the time of the Rainbow Warrior bombing has been replaced by US-China rivalry

in the Pacific. Specific threats include the persistent radioactive contamination from the tests; the issue of newer fallout from the Fukushima nuclear power plant hit by the 2011 Tōhoku tsunami in Japan; and concerns about China's undeclared plans for Taiwan, which raises the spectre of nuclear conflict. 'Nearly 70 years on, the continued refusal of the concerned powers to own up to their past transgressions and compensate victims deepens the sense of injustice in the region,' said University of the South Pacific commentator Shailendra Singh.

In August 2011, *Rainbow Warrior II* was 'retired' from active Greenpeace duty, having achieved what her predecessor had embarked on – ending the French nuclear tests – along with many other successful campaigns, such as blocking coal ports and obstructing destructive fishing operations. Four months later, the \$32 million super-green sailing ship *Rainbow Warrior III* was commissioned and entered the global fray.

From the 'floating farmhouse' that had been the Phyllis Cormack in the first Greenpeace expedition to the Aleutian islands in the North Pacific, the environmental movement had made do with refitting existing ships for its campaign needs. Finally, four decades later, Greenpeace had a custom-designed campaigning vessel. The sleek new 58 metre *Rainbow Warrior III* is fast – cruising at 7 knots but able to go up to 15 knots, she can deploy action boats within minutes, and has a helicopter landing pad. She sails chiefly under sail-power with a 55 metre A-frame mast with back-up electric engines. Greenpeace International's executive director Kumi Naidu described her as 'an icon of non-violent action and a beacon of hope'. *Rainbow Warrior III* visited New Zealand in 2013 and after Cyclone Pam devastated Vanuatu in March 2015, she was loaded up for a relief support voyage to the stricken islands which echoed the humanitarian efforts of her namesake in the Marshall Islands in the same month 30 years ago.⁷

Greenpeace skipper Peter Willcox, the only person to captain all three *Rainbow Warriors*, approached the

thirtieth anniversary of the Auckland bombing by writing a book of his own, *Stemming The Tide* (due for publication in 2016). As well as many other adventures as a Greenpeace captain for more than three decades, Willcox's most recent escapade was in Russia. He was arrested illegally by Russian authorities as skipper of the Arctic Sunrise on 19 September 2013 for taking part in a peaceful protest against Arctic oil drilling. The so-called Arctic 30 were seized by armed commandos in international waters while trying to hoist a banner on Gazprom's Prirazlomnaya platform in the Barents Sea. They were initially charged with 'piracy', but this was later reduced to a charge of 'hooliganism'. After an intensive international campaign to free the final 19 still being detained, the Russian Duma voted to grant them an amnesty after they had served 100 days in detention. Willcox told the *Moscow Times* after his release: 'There is no amnesty for the Arctic. ... I should never have been charged and jailed in the first place.' Reflecting on the Rongelap evacuation, the now 62-year-old skipper described the operation as: 'One of the mostly profoundly emotional experiences of my life. In many respects, this is why Greenpeace acts to 'bear witness' to these abuses; to shine a light on the terrible things that we do to the Earth and to each other. Sure, Greenpeace cares about whales and polar bears, and corals and seals, but we also care about humankind and our kids, our future grandkids.'

It was a tragic irony that the Rongelap voyage for humanity should end in death at the hands of French state terrorists. The pressure on France and other nuclear countries will continue. The sordid *Rainbow Warrior* affair was a diplomatic debacle for the French, especially in the South Pacific, and it has taken years for Paris to recover some *mana* in the region. Greenpeace and the environmental movement have grown dramatically and matured over the past three decades. Campaigns have been broadened into issues such as climate change, driftnet fisheries, genetic engineering, glacier retreat, offshore oil drilling and the illegal rainforest timber trade. Now



Author David Robie with a copy of the original *Eyes of Fire* book on board the *Rainbow Warrior* before she was laid to rest in the Cavalli Islands, off Motutapere, in 1987. The painted motif on the smokestack was from the Kwakiutl First Nation in Canada.

perhaps Elaine Shaw and the Danielsons will one day get their full commission of inquiry into the Tahitians' health after all. And the Tahitians could win some serious compensation for being poisoned like the Rongelapese. France's Morin law in 2010 has been too little, too late. But with nine French Polynesian nuclear test veterans winning compensation in January 2015 and another, a former radar operator at Hao and Moruroa atolls, who is a tetraplegic with brain cancer, winning a case two months later, there are some optimistic signs. The original *Rainbow Warrior's* last voyage and the death of Fernando Pereira were not in vain. From nuclear refugees to climate change refugees, the activist struggle for peace, environmental and global justice lives on with *Rainbow Warrior III*.

■ This is an extract from Dr David Robie's book, *Eyes of Fire*, which tells the story of the last voyage of the original *Rainbow Warrior*, a Greenpeace campaign vessel bombed by French secret agents on 10 July 1985 in Auckland. It adapts text from the final chapter of the 30th anniversary edition of *Eyes of Fire* published in July 2015 by Little Island. <http://eyes-of-fire.littleisland.co.nz/>