

LEADING UP TO THE BLAST 1973

As speculation increases that the French nuclear tests in the Pacific are about to begin, New Zealand's naval frigate "Otago" is sailing near the test site on Mururoa Atoll.

"Otago" is still outside the 72-mile danger zone France has declared around the atoll but the New Zealand Government is expected to order her to sail inside.

The frigate was sent into the area as a protest against the tests which New Zealand and Australia strongly oppose. The New Zealand Immigration Minister, Fraser Colman, is on board along with 245 crew.

The French have declared a ban on shipping and aircraft within the 70 mile (115 kms) radius of the atoll from midnight local time on Wednesday.

French territorial waters extend only 12 miles (12 kms) from the Atoll "Otago" has already been shadowed by French aircraft and a French minesweeper.

The New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr. Norman Kirk, says the French ban on shipping and the presence of the minesweeper should remind the rest of the world that what is taking place on Mururoa is not only against the law, but against the interests of every country in the world.

The Captain of "Otago", Commander Alan Tyrell, developed some unusual views on nuclear testing after he observed the British tests in the Pacific on Christmas Island. He explained these to a reporter:

SYNOPSIS: The New Zealand naval frigate "Otago" is demonstrating New Zealand's opposition to French nuclear

testing in the Pacific

The Australian tanker, HMAS, "Supply" has been refuelling "Otago". The New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr. Norman Kirk has revealed that ironically the fuel was bought from a French-owned company.

The Captain of the Otago, Commander Alan Tyrell, is responsible for the safety of his crew of 245 men, and his special passenger, New Zealand's Minister of Immigration, Fraser Colman.

Speculation is mounting that the tests will take place on 14th July -- Bastille day. This follows the French announcement of a ban on shipping and aircraft within a 72 mile radius of the Atoll from Thursday.

"Otago" has already been shadowed by French minesweeper, although the frigate was steaming outside the 72-mile radius.

The New Zealand government is expected to order "Otago" inside the danger zone but its has also ordered that the crew must not be placed in danger. Captain Tyrell can remember the earlier British nuclear tests in the Pacific.

Commander Tyrell's disappointment if the tests go ahead mirrors that of many New Zealanders.