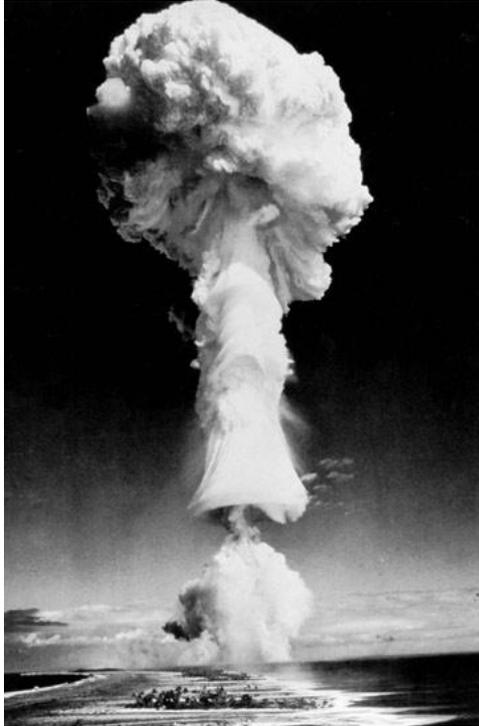


Michael [FIELD](#)

Mururoa fallout worse than first thought

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Reuters

BOOM: A mushroom cloud forms over the South Pacific atoll of Mururoa during one of numerous atmospheric tests France conducted in the region between 1966-1974.

South Pacific

Newly declassified French military documents have revealed that nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll were far more deadly than has previously been admitted with plutonium fallout at much higher levels and over wider areas.

The documents cover the 46 atmospheric nuclear tests conducted at Mururoa and Fangataufa in French Polynesia between 1966 and 1974 and reveal that warships near the tests were hit by higher levels of radioactivity than known.

A New Zealand Labour Government in 1973 sent two warships, HMNZS Canterbury and HMNZS Otago, to monitor the Mururoa tests. It was not believed, at the time, that they may have received nuclear dusting but these new documents reveal there were much higher levels of radiation than were known.

A 1974 test, code named Centaur, dumped 500 times the maximum allowed level of plutonium fallout on Tahiti, 1250 kilometres away, the documents show.

There were also 140 more incidents of nuclear fallout above the 209 incidents already known. Tahiti, home to around 178,000 people, was hit 37 times by fallout.

Radiation levels frequently rose in New Zealand 4700 kilometres away following each test. Opposition to the testing was a key political issue in New Zealand, not only prompting the despatching of warships, but also a successful International Court of Justice case against France. In 1985 French secret agents sank a Greenpeace ship, Rainbow Warrior, as it was preparing to leave Auckland for Mururoa. One man was killed.

Today in French Polynesia the 47th anniversary of the first nuclear test at Mururoa (a plutonium fission bomb code-named Aldebaran) is being marked.

A local association of nuclear workers, Mururoa e Tatou, released a detailed analysis of 2050 pages in 58 documents of French Military of Defence documents kept secret. Of the new documents, 114 pages were blanked out by the military.

In January, French Overseas Territory Minister Victorin Lurel approved release of the documents to a French Polynesian official investigating the impact of the tests, Bruno Barillot. Before Barillot completed his study, he was fired by the new pro-Paris territorial government of Gaston Flosse.

Mururoa e Tatou head Roland Oldham yesterday released the documents and Barillot's study and, according to the [Tahiti Infosnews](#) website, the documents show that fallout hit more often and in more places across French Polynesia than was previously released.