

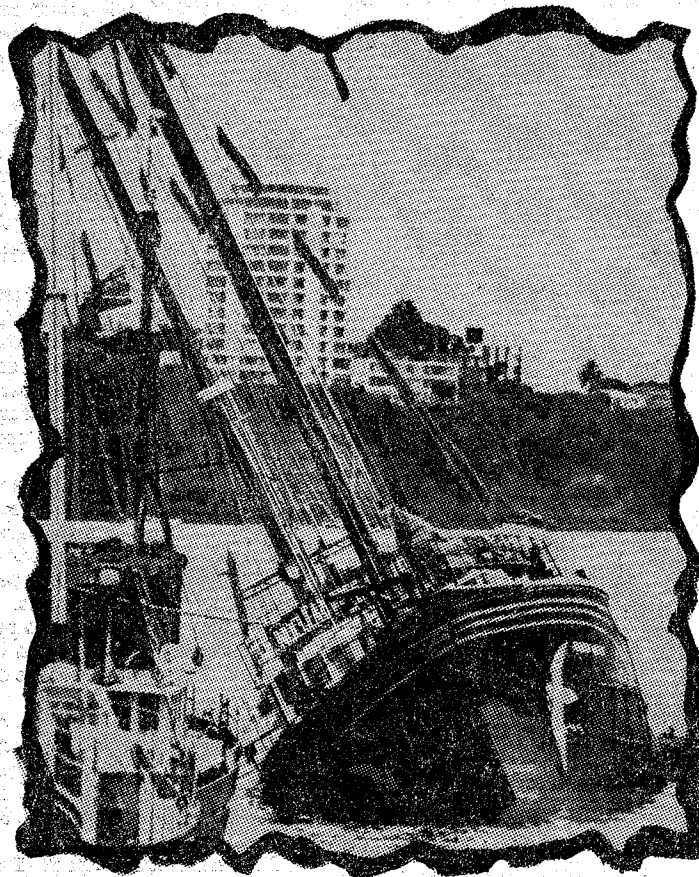
A television drama will throw fresh light on the destruction of the Rainbow Warrior

When the French turn to terrorism

The French Secret Service might like the whole thing to go away, but last week's controversial release of agent Dominique Prieur puts the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, which is about to become a Channel 7 mini-series, right back on the front page. BERWYN LEWIS reports



Above, from left: convicted agent Dominique Prieur; Jack Thompson who plays a public servant in the mini-series; producer Bob Loader. Below: the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland Harbour after the saboteurs had struck



‘At least 15 crew usually slept below ... all could have died’

and were arrogant enough to force New Zealand, through trade embargoes, to let the convicted couple be released to their Pacific island jail”.

The series begins with the animosity between the French and Greenpeace in Mururoa. “The central core story — the raid on Rainbow Warrior and its aftermath, the pursuit, capture, incarceration and then release of the French people,” explains Loader.

He runs through Rainbow Warrior's now legendary final hours and voyage: “The plan was that Rainbow Warrior would go to Auckland where a flotilla would be formed to go to Mururoa for the third time. The difference this time was that Rainbow Warrior was a significant and substantial boat. It was equipped with systems to send out images and information (for news and documentaries) 24 hours a day.

“Pictures had been sent on previous occasions from international waters. They were so graphic that people all over the world had been affected by images — baby seals being bashed with ice picks, barrels of nuclear waste being dumped

and people being beaten up by the French. It caused a storm of protest. The French were embarrassed. It was getting out of hand and they decided to mount some kind of attack.”

Loader claims the mini-series reveals “new information on the incident” which has come to light since the release of all the latest books and reports.

To dramatise and personalise the story Loader says the script team invented three composite characters. “Curiously, although they were fictitious one of them in particular is very close to someone who exists. This was not intentional.”

One of the three characters, a New Zealand senior public servant played by Jack Thompson, draws attention to the problems created by New Zealand's exclusion from the “information club” — the special arrangement by the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. “In the process this senior public servant realises that the intelligence services of UK and USA had some idea that something like this was going to happen,” says Loader.

Loader says: “There was a lot of personal betrayal. The French penetrated Greenpeace and betrayed people on a one-to-one basis. A French woman (Christine Cabon played by Rosemary Blundo) arrived, appeared to be sympathetic to Greenpeace, worked with them on a voluntary basis, and lived with them. She was a member of the French Secret Service.”

He dismisses the suggestion that filming the series, half of which took place in New Zealand, may have attracted the attention of French Secret Service agents.

Was he aware of any unidentifiable extras on the set?

“While we were up on the Bay of Islands (in New Zealand) there were reports that there were a couple of French people following us around and watching us with binoculars,” says Loader. “The police tried to track them down but they vanished...”

“This is certainly the most traumatic thing that has happened to Greenpeace. Man-slaughter is one word. At least 15 people usually slept below decks. They could have all been killed. It was just pure coincidence that the night the French chose for the bombing there was a birthday party on deck. Had they been below deck they could not have escaped.

“I think the French Secret Service wishes the whole story would go away but it won't.”

LATE on the evening of July 10 1985 Auckland's waterfront was rocked by two big explosions. The Greenpeace vessel, Rainbow Warrior, sank at her berth and her expeditions photographer, who was trapped below, drowned.

Immediate police investigations revealed that the French Secret Service was involved and a couple, posing as Swiss tourists, were arrested. Convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years in jail, they were released after sustained economic and political pressure on New Zealand.

They had served less than a year of their sentences before being transferred by the French to a French military base in the Pacific.

“Outrage at this bombing incident will soon be rekindled with the launch of a four-hour mini-series, Rainbow Warrior, which apart from its political significance promises to be a thundering good story.

Produced by Golden Dolphin Productions in association with Energy Source Television (NZ) this trans-Tasman production has been pre-sold to Network Seven and will go to air later this year.

It is particularly timely following on the heels of the French elections, terrorist outrages in some of France's overseas territories and the conveniently pregnant Dominique Prieur (played in the mini-series by Louise Lapare). One of the im-

prisoned French agents, she is now back in France awaiting the happy event.

With its David and Goliath implications, producer Bob Loader says the mini-series “is a story about big countries versus little ones and a matter of nuclear countries against New Zealand. It is so outrageous”.

He has “reasons other than just the making of films involved in this project”.

“Almost everyone working on this production thinks it was a terrible thing to have happened and that this series will help ensure that it never happens again,” he says. “It will certainly give the French Secret Service pause for thought.”

In the drafting of the script and filming, Loader was intent on avoiding “the tendency to steer the story in self-serving directions”. Says Loader: “This is not necessarily good drama.”

His biggest problem was compressing it into four hours: “We had enough to make eight.”

Another problem for the film team was how to avoid making a simplistic drama in purely good and bad terms — noble Greenpeace versus the treacherous French. “If people are wholly bad they are just not interesting.”

The actors who play the villainous French characters are all French Canadians. To Loader's surprise he discovered French Canadians “did not identify with France” and this meant that “their roles in the series did not pose any problems of national conflict”.

“A couple of French actors we initially considered would have been a bit nervous although nobody said that. People said, ‘You'll never sell this to France’, but French companies are falling over themselves to buy it and distribute it around the world.”

But might not their interest be an extension of the plot? Buy it and bury it.

“That's a ridiculous suggestion,” says Loader. “They're commercial organisations. If

they advance the sort of money we need to get our investors' money back they couldn't afford to write it off ... unless the French Government was behind it.”

His fascination with the Rainbow Warrior incident is three-pronged — he is outraged that “an international power could carry out such an act and get away with it, that they made such a mess of it despite their resources, and that they thought they could cover it up