

French President Okayed Bombing of Greenpeace Ship

PARIS — The state-sponsored bombing of Greenpeace flagship *Rainbow Warrior* 20 years ago was carried out with “personal authorization” by France’s late president Francois Mitterrand, documents show.

The July 9 edition of the French daily *Le Monde* published excerpts of a 1986 account written by Pierre Lacoste, the former head of France’s secret service. The extract gives the clearest demonstration yet of Mitterrand’s direct involvement in the sinking of the campaign vessel.

Portuguese photographer Fernando Pereira was killed in the July 10, 1985 bombing of the ship that was leading

Yucca Mt. Dump Plan on the Skids

LAS VEGAS — Lawyers for the state of Nevada argued in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims April 7 that electric ratepayers should be refunded the \$40 million that’s been set aside for the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump near Las Vegas. Nevada wants the money returned now to allow the nuclear waste producers to pursue other storage options. The Energy Department’s schedule to finish the Yucca Mt. repository by 2012 is “sheer fantasy” the lawyers said, citing numerous problems.

Yucca Mt., 90 miles from Las Vegas, is planned as an underground repository for 77,000 tons of the nation’s nuclear waste.

Nevada Attorney General Brian Sandov said in court papers, “the repository is unlikely ever to open,” pointing to the lack of a complete license application, the incomplete document database, the unfinished new radiation standard to replace the one thrown out by a federal appeals court a year ago, and the current investigations into falsified scientific information based on e-mail exchanges by federal employees. The DOE is already seven years behind schedule.

A congressional subcommittee investigating falsification of research by dumpsite engineers issued a

The Dirt on Contaminated Soil

Some Japanese radioactive waste to be transported to undisclosed U.S. location

JAPAN — There’s a saying in Japan, “The nuclear industry is like a house without a toilet.” On August 9, Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and Japan Nuclear Cycle Development Institute formally announced its intention to ship 290 cubic meters of uranium-contaminated soil to the U.S. The soil has been abandoned for 40 years, near the border of Tottori and Okayama Prefectures in southern Japan, and has contaminated area rice paddies. A contract may soon be signed with an unnamed U.S. refining company that expects to earn \$5.5 million to process the soil. The shipment is expected by the middle of September. MEXT’s representative said that U.S. government approval has been obtained.

—Citizens’ Nuclear Information Center, Japan, Aug. 15, 2005

Radioactive soil shipments moving again

LONG ISLAND, New York — The Long Island Railroad halted its shipments of radioactive soil from Brookhaven National Laboratory on June 23, leaving 60 rail cars of contaminated dirt standing on the tracks in Brookhaven for weeks. An agreement with the president of the borough of

DOE to Resume Production of Plutonium-238

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Department of Energy is moving to resume production of plutonium-238 as an energy source for spacecraft, spy satellites and undersea military operations. The DOE claims existing supplies will be depleted by 2010. Plutonium production is set to be consolidated at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL). The Idaho National Lab is located close to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

A final decision on consolidation is expected later this year. Plutonium-238 is not used for nuclear weapons, but its steady, virtually infinite release of heat during decay makes the isotope valuable as a heat source to produce electricity in spacecraft, satellite and undersea missions that are unable to rely on the sun as an energy source. It is 300 times more radioactive than weapons-grade plutonium-239, and ingesting a speck can be fatal.

The U.S. stopped producing plutonium-238 in the mid-1990s when it shut down the last weapons reactor at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina. It has relied on existing stockpiles and a 35-pound supply provided by Russia that is limited to use by the space program.

The process for making plutonium-238 requires taking neptunium oxide stored at INEL and putting it in INEL’s Advanced Test Reactor. The neptunium is bombarded with neutrons, which turns some of it into plutonium-238. The neptunium “targets” are mechanically processed to extract the plutonium, which then is turned into a ceramic pellet. Finally, the pellets are put into the Radioactive Thermal Generators, or batteries, to create energy.

Currently the government has about 87 pounds of plutonium-238 but expects all but 14 pounds to be used up

Greenpeace’s campaign against France’s underwater nuclear weapons tests off the Mururoa Atoll in the Pacific. French government agents committed the murder while *Rainbow Warrior* was docked at Auckland, in New Zealand.

“I asked the president if he gave me permission to put into action the neutralization plan that I had studied on the request of Monsieur Hernu,” Lacoste wrote. Charles Hernu was France’s defense minister at the time.

“He [Mitterrand] gave me his agreement while stressing the importance he placed on the nuclear tests. I didn’t go into greater detail on the plan as the authorization was explicit enough,” Lacoste said. He added that he “would not have

subpoena to the Energy Department in July. The congressional staff members said they wanted more technical studies, organizational charts and lists of acronyms. The DOE has stonewalled and has complained about the committee’s earlier release of e-mail messages detailing the falsifications.

In those e-mails, U.S. Geological Survey workers talked about faking their studies’ numbers in order to meet quality-assurance standards.

Representative Jon Porter, R-Nevada, chair of the Subcommittee on the Federal Work Force of the Government Reform Committee, said in a statement, “I will not be deterred by [DOE’s] lack of responsiveness.”

In a memo released Aug. 4, Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff told the DOE that in its preparation of a license application, the DOE undercounted the number of Air Force plane crashes at Yucca during the 1990s, and discounted the possibility of jettisoned ordnance, birds hitting planes and cruise missile testing at the Nevada Test Site. The DOE also made an unsupported assumption that airplanes that malfunction outside the no-fly zone would never enter the zone and crash into the dump.

Queens is required for all shipments of hazardous waste, and permission had not been granted. New York City’s Office of Emergency Management, the Long Island Rail Road and the borough reached an agreement July 21. For each trainload of radioactive waste, New York’s emergency management office will notify the Manhattan Transit Authority police, the New York City Police Department, the NYC Fire Department and other emergency agencies.

—*Newsday*, July 26, 2005

Radioactive dirt spilled on Virginia highway

WYTHEVILLE, Virginia — An accident involving a tractor-trailer carrying radioactive debris shut down part of I-81 in Wythe County, in southwest Virginia, for a time on July 8. The truck originated in Connecticut and was hauling contaminated soil and parts of a demolished building. Radioactive dirt and other items spilled onto the roadway. Following the accident, authorities were alerted that the load might be radioactive. The truck was not marked as a radiation hazard. Emergency crews tested the soil and claimed the level of contamination was not high enough to be a danger to the public.

—*WorldNow*; & WAVY - TV.com, July 9, 2005

by 2010, including about 55 pounds for national security-related programs.

“These power systems have been used for the past 30 years, and we expect that their need will continue,” DOE spokesman Mike Waldron said. “Production of plutonium-238 is critical if the U.S. is to continue its leadership in areas of space exploration and provide for certain classified security operations.”

Plutonium-238 Battery Failures go Global

Plutonium batteries used in the space program are responsible for widespread contamination.

* In 1964, rocket failure led to the destruction of a navigation satellite, Transit 5BN-3, powered by P-238, spreading radioactivity around the globe and starting a debate over the health effects caused by plutonium-powered batteries.

* In 1965, high in the Himalayas, an intelligence team caught in a blizzard lost a plutonium-powered device meant to spy on China.

* In 1968, an errant weather satellite, the Nimbus B-1, crashed into the Pacific, but federal teams managed to recover its 4.2-pound P-238 battery intact from the Santa Barbara Channel, off the coast of California.

* In 1970, Apollo 13 fell to the ocean floor in the south pacific, off New Zealand, carrying with it between 5.5 and 8.3 pounds of P-238. It has never been recovered.

launched such an operation without the personal authorization of the President of the Republic.”

The scandal, which triggered Hernu’s resignation and Lacoste’s departure from the secret service, shocked the world and tarnished France’s image.

Two French agents were later tried and imprisoned for blowing up the ship. They began their sentences in New Zealand but were later transferred to a military base in French Polynesia and were released within three years of the attack.

Lacoste’s April 8, 1986 account is contained in a 23-page handwritten document that has only now come to light.

The account is supported by documents in the secret service’s archives and others likely to be in Lacoste’s own possession, *Le Monde* said.

No word was forthcoming from the Justice Ministry as to whether Lacoste will be charged with murder and conspiracy in the attack.

Famine & U.S. Still Stalking N. Korea

LOS ANGELES — As North Korea works to fend off U.S. military threats, fears grow inside the country that it “could be facing a famine as severe as the one that cost the lives of about two million people in the mid-1990s.”

The *Los Angeles Times* reported July 3 that mass mobilization was under way in which “even office workers from the city” spend weekends in the countryside planting rice and other crops.

Bad spring weather, a poor 2004 harvest and international hostility in the form of aid cutoffs have combined to produce an “especially short supply” of food. South Korea — reportedly angry about the North’s withdrawal from six-nation talks on the North’s nuclear weapons program — delayed shipments of fertilizer. “Barley is still on the stalks that should have been harvested weeks ago so that the same fields can be used for rice,” the *Times* reported, in part because of the lack of fertilizer.

In March 2002, the Pentagon’s Nuclear Posture Review recommended building new U.S. nuclear weapons “tailored” to destroy targets in North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Libya. North Korea’s Central News Agency responded then by saying, “If the U.S. intends to mount a nuclear attack on any part of the DPRK just as it did on Hiroshima, it is grossly mistaken. A nuclear war to be imposed by U.S. nuclear fanatics would mean their ruin in nuclear disaster.”

Since 2002, North Korean president Kim John Il has said, “If the U.S. recognized our sovereignty and assures nonaggression, it is our view that we should be able to find a way to resolve the nuclear issue.” It is an assurance that the White House has refused to give. In April, Mr. Bush called Mr. Kim a “tyrant” and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has called the country an “outpost of tyranny.”

Again Aug. 1, the North repeated its promise to rejoin the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and permit international inspections of its nuclear sites, but only if the U.S. and the other participants in six-nation talks guarantee non-aggression.

The North’s plans to build nuclear power reactors were once happily endorsed by the U.S. state department, which was helping Westinghouse Co., General Electric and other reactor builders do business.

Plutonium production at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico and the Savannah River Site would be shifted to Idaho. If approved, the plutonium-238 complex will be finished by 2009 and production would begin by 2012. The construction cost is expected to be more than \$300 million. However, the entire program is expected to cost upwards of \$1.5 billion over 30 years and produce more than 50,000 drums of hazardous and radioactive waste. Plans call for making 11 pounds of plutonium-238 every year for over 30 years. The DOE denies that the production program involves putting nuclear weapons into space.

Federal experts say that the newest versions of the plutonium batteries are made to withstand rupture and the dispersion of deadly radiation, and that the risk of human exposure is extraordinarily low.

Local environmental and antinuclear groups oppose the DOE plan because of the extreme danger of plutonium and the department’s terrible record of accidents and contamination. Mary Woollen-Mitchell of Keep Yellowstone Nuclear Free said, “They are concentrating all this production in just one place but it has never really been done safely anywhere. We’re skeptical when they say, ‘We know enough to make sure it’s safe and to avoid an accident.’” The Snake River Alliance, a nuclear watchdog in Idaho, said, “Idaho is once again in the bull’s eye for a dangerous nuclear program that will create more nuclear waste and increase the contamination risks for our people, economy, and environment.”

—*Guardian Unlimited*, June 27; *New York Times*, June 27; Idaho National Laboratory <www.inel.gov>; & *Independent News & Media* (UK), June 28, 2005