Award-winning author Janet Hunt wrote the following story in 1985 but before it could be published, the Rainbow Warrior was bombed and it never reached the press. With the peace march coming up, it seems just as pertinent now as it did 24 years ago.

Voyage for peace

It was near midnight, Wednesday 10 July, 1985. It was peaceful down by Marsden Wharf, lights reflecting, black waters lapping against the piles. There were distant sounds of people drifting along the street, the diminished noise of traffic.

On board the Rainbow Warrior, nine crew and four visitors had spent the evening in the warmth of friendship and camaraderie shared by people with a common purpose. The party was nearly over and some had retired to bed.

We know what happened next. A bomb exploded against the hull, killing crew-member Fernando Pereira. It was a direct assault, intended to nullify the peace movement's protest at Moruroa Atoll in September for the Rainbow Warrior was more than a converted cod trawler — she was the Greenpeace flagship and a symbol of resistance to nuclear abuse in the Pacific. She was to have been the parent ship for a flotilla of six vessels but instead layN drunkenly against the wharf, the dove on her prow almost covered by the waves.

For vessels such as Django and the trimaran Kilis II, her loss made an unsupported voyage difficult but it was a different story for others. The Warrior's loss only increased their determination.

Return to 1985. Gael Johnson is 27. She has two young daughters, Monse (6) and Resi (4). She will be one of seven crew on the Alliance when it sails from Auckland some time towards the end of July.

Before the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior she and her fellow crew-members had weighed up the dangers; 4800 often stormy kilometres to Moruroa with the prospect on arrival of additional hazards including a hostile reception and the likelihood of radiation. They will be at least four months away from homes and families. The loss of the Rainbow Warrior has brought those realities into sharp focus.

"There's been a whole heap of facing up to things we thought we wouldn't have to encounter until we got there. We were all high in celebration of those good, beautiful, strong people, with meeting up with the ship which is the symbol of our hopes, and we were totally blown away with what happened," says Gael.

"We have had to work through a whole process of grief and anger, but we have to get over it ... it has made us stronger in our resolve to carry on."

So why, given the danger, are Gael and her crewmates Tony Still (the owner of Alliance), Dave Wray, Paul Hodson, Frank Gaglio, Rangana Godinovich and Angela Ryan continuing to make a journey that must now seem even more perilous?

Gael is blunt: she believes the third world war is not just a distant possibility — it began, in fact, in 1945. "We are actually surviving a nuclear assault which is directed against all life forms on the planet," she says. "You don't 'test' weapons that have a half-life of 24,000 years! That's just rubbish. Those weapons are being used against the animals and creatures of the ocean and the earth."

"Test" suggests 'controlled' and 'safe', but it's not any of those things at all, and that's been proven by the situation that Micronesian people find themselves in. There was a series of tests carried out there in the 1950s and now they're really sick people. The islands have been poisoned for their lifetimes and for lifetimes to come.

Preparations for the voyage have been slow. The initial crew, Tony, Dave, Paul and Gael, have been working since March when the first call from Greenpeace for vessels to join the South Pacific Peace Flotilla went out. They have invested a great deal of personal, financial and emotional energy in the journey. Alliance required refitting to make her seaworthy; new sails were needed, gear had to be borrowed and funds raised.

Because Rainbow Warrior will no longer be with them, there is greater need for safety equipment and an improved radio system. Part of the engine was Rainbow Warrior when it went...
and was badly damaged, but has since been repaired.

"Miraculously, a couple of days after the bombing, this 60-year-old engineer with black horn-rimmed glasses appeared on the wharf with drawings of the engine, and has gone away to fabricate a similar part," says Gael.

She is grateful for the support of family, friends and peace groups, especially on Waiheke where the boat is based. Community support has been automatic; there have been stalls at the market for months and in the last weeks, an island-wide call for provisions nettet a supply of dried foods for the voyage.

In fact, Gael says one of the most valuable messages the Alliance carries in its mission for peace, is the vision of co-operation, "Men and women are working together in balance. We can say 'hey, look, it does work!'"

All crew will share tasks on the voyage and Gael and Dave have both attended a navigation class as part of their preparations. In the months since March however, the most efficient method of working has been to do each task as it occurs, not to plan ahead. Gael, for instance, has been head of the ground crew, using her skills for organisation and financial management to link the workers on the boat with the support network outside.

"Is she worried about radiation? The fish they will eat along the way may well be contaminated and she concedes that a Geiger counter would be useful. "We'll try to keep our food as clean as we can, as radioactive particles are bio-accumulative and do build up in your system.""

"A lot of people say they'd stay as far away as possible from radiation hot-spots, but for me, I guess I don't see any difference between the present moment and the future. Maybe if I stayed on the West Coast for the next sixty years, I might be able to avoid getting as irradiated as going to Moruroa, but in the sense of my species life-time, that's no time period at all.

"That's no great shakes, just saving myself."

What then, of Gael's children? Many women would be unable or reluctant to leave young families for four months.

"If I didn't have the support of their father, who's willing to be a real father and wants to be an involved and nurturing parent and will look after them, I wouldn't want to go."

She points to changes in many homes where women are main income earners, as she herself was for many years; changes which not only enable her to take action, but also create a responsibility to do so.

"This has created a real validity for women's direct action. In a political sense, it's the men who are creating the warfare. We can no longer just stay at home with our kids and say "Oh, the men are looking after us."

"If you give up your ability to take power in your life, you create a situation that gives another bunch of people more power over you than they should have and I always look at myself and ask what action I can take."

Alliance was to have departed on Bastille Day, 14 July; there has been torrential rain and there is now a heightened sense of danger. It is a sad irony that the flotilla's mission of drawing the attention of the world to the tests as well as to the problems of the transit of nuclear-armed and propelled vessels and to the dumping of nuclear wastes, has gained dramatic impetus through the bombing.

While Alliance and two other vessels, Vega and Verinigan are away, two major international conferences will debate the nuclear question. The first is the South Pacific Prime Ministers Conference in Rarotonga in August, the second the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in Geneva in September. Throughout these conferences, the presence of the South Pacific Peace Flotilla will be a reminder of the peoples of the Pacific.

Gael is confident, "Despite anxieties at times, the feeling on board is very strong. We are being visited by at least twenty-five people every day, and each one who comes brings something of themselves and gives it to us."

"We're just the representatives who happen to be going. We have the strength of thousands."