



Rongelap women abandoning their atoll with the Rainbow Warrior.

Berkeley, all Rongalapese aged under 15 when exposed to the Bravo fallout face a premature death from cancer.

"I remember the day of the test vividly," recalls Anjain, as he relaxes with a nephew in the shade of a pandanus tree. "I was making coffee with a friend just before dawn. All of a sudden, a big bright light flashed in the west and the explosion came later. And about 10 in the morning powder started to fall on the island.

"People carried on doing their own thing but the children played in this strange stuff falling out of the sky — we didn't know what it was. About 10 pm, many of the islanders had become sick. They were vomiting, felt nausea or had diarrhoea. When we got up the next day and drank the water it had turned to a dark yellow — almost black.

"On the second day, people were really sick and couldn't move around. Just a few strong men tried staggering from home to home to check on everybody and get food. Most of our people were terribly sick that day — all they could do was lie down and wait.

"About five o'clock a US Navy seaplane came from Eniwetak and two Americans with combat suits came ashore. I asked them what they were doing, and they said, 'We've just got 20 minutes to come ashore.'

"They brought what I was later told was a geiger counter to measure the radiation. As soon as they got ashore they went near the church and checked the nearby water tank. I guessed they knew the radiation was too high, but they said nothing and left.

"On the third day, a destroyer arrived in our lagoon and a landing craft came ashore. The military talked to me as I was the mayor. They told me to get all the people ready to leave because another day on the atoll and we would

all die."

Medical teams from the Atomic Energy Commission (now the Department of Energy) began examining the islanders after they were moved to Kwajalein atoll and have returned to do follow-up tests at least once a year since then, as part of an official study of the exposed people. They bring their own food from the US and do not eat local coconut crabs, turtles, clams, coconuts and breadfruit.

A document from the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York, produced three years after Bravo, said: "Greater knowledge of radiation effects on human beings is badly needed.... Even though the radioactive contamination of Rongelap island is considered perfectly safe for human habitation, the levels of activity are higher than those found in other inhabited locations in the world. The habitation of these people on the island

A Rongelap leader, Jeban Riklon (right), and other islanders float building materials ashore at Mejato island.



will afford most valuable ecological radiation data on human beings."

Little wonder that the Rongalapese allege they have been used as guinea pigs by the US in a planned experiment on radiation.

Documents I have in my possession under the freedom of information legislation, including a 1954 report on the Bravo test prepared by the Defence Nuclear Agency, challenge the official US government claim that the fallout was an "accident" because of a sudden change in wind direction. The DNA report reveals that six hours before the blast, weather briefings showed "winds at 20,000 feet were heading for Rongelap to the east." And still the bomb was triggered.

Filmmaker O'Rourke, whose documentary is a powerful indictment of US policy in the Marshall Islands, says: "I never believed when I started the research that the Americans set out with a deliberate policy to expose the Marshallese to radiation, although I met a lot of people who asserted that they did. But at the end of the project I can say that they certainly allowed the exposure to happen, and have used the victims ever since as guinea pigs to study the long-term effects of radiation on human beings who have to live in a contaminated environment. This will be all of us in the event of a nuclear war."

Scientists check only the 59 people, originally exposed on Rongelap who are still living while using a small "unexposed" group for a control population. The department doesn't systematically follow up the entire population to identify possible second and third generation health disorders.

"The DOE checks are the ultimate in degradation for these people — it is like animals being loaded onto an experimental conveyor while the scientists maintain an arrogant silence," says Glenn Alcalay, a Marshallese-speaking anthropologist who recently testified before the United Nations Trusteeship Council. "When one considers the in-