

2nd Suspect Arrested in Deaths of Migrants; Identity Withheld; British Police Wait To Question Survivors

The Washington Post

June 21, 2000, Wednesday, Final Edition

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Section: A SECTION; Pg. A16

Length: 668 words

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Dateline: LONDON, June 20

Body

Police have made a second arrest in the deaths of 58 Chinese illegal immigrants whose bodies were found in an unventilated truck in the British port of Dover, Dutch authorities said today.

The suspect was taken into custody Monday during a police sweep through three buildings in the Dutch port of Rotterdam, according to a statement from the Unit for Alien Smuggling, a department of the Dutch Justice Ministry.

The suspect's identity and other personal information about him were not released. Earlier, authorities had said they were searching for Arie van der Spek, 24, a Dutch engineer from Rotterdam who owned the company that leased the truck in which the victims were found late Sunday.

In Britain, meanwhile, police said all 58 victims were in their twenties and apparently had died of "respiratory failure." Also, the first accounts emerged from two traumatized, dehydrated survivors--the only people to escape the truck alive.

Quoting unidentified hospital sources, reports in London newspapers said the two men told an interpreter that they banged on the truck's walls and shouted, their desperation mounting as their companions began to pass out and die.

The survivors remained hospitalized under guard in Canterbury, 55 miles southeast of London, and investigators said they hoped the two men would be fit enough for formal questioning late today. Authorities say they are the keys to tracing the immigrant smugglers who organized the migrants' hellish journey from Belgium across the English Channel to Dover, on England's southern coast.

The 60 men were packed in among a load of tomatoes, and the truck's refrigeration unit was turned off as temperatures outside reached the high 80s, the hottest day of the year so far.

"To have 60 young people in the back of a truck, there would have to have been some organization to get these people over from China," said Dennis McGookin, a detective with the Kent County police. "In liaising with the Chinese police, hopefully we will know more on this soon."

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Much of the investigation has focused on the Dutch connections, including the driver of the truck, who was Dutch, and the Dutch company that leased the vehicle. In the Netherlands, **police** would not say whether the **suspect arrested** Monday was van der Spek, the man who owned the trucking company. Van der Spek was said to live above a bicycle shop with his parents in a two-story apartment building in Rotterdam.

Police said earlier that he had registered the company, Van der Spek Transporten, with the Chamber of Commerce on June 15, but **police** said some of the registration information had proved to be false, including the company's telephone number and postal code.

In Britain, Dutch **police** joined **British** officers today in **questioning** the driver of the truck, who was **arrested** Monday on suspicion of manslaughter after customs officials found the bodies.

Discovery of the truckload of bodies has prompted Britain to launch a major investigation into the lucrative, international racket of smuggling **migrants** to Western countries and focused a spotlight on the desperate measures such **migrants** are willing to take. **British** authorities said crime syndicates smuggle thousands of illegal aliens through the country's ports.

The victims in this case appeared to be from China's southern Fujian province, where racketeers known as "snakeheads" charge would-be **migrants** up to \$ 60,000 to organize their dangerous journey to the West. A Chinese attorney in London said that three relatives of the victims--themselves illegal immigrants--had contacted him but that they feared deportation if they spoke with **police**.

"Our main concern is how the relatives are going to come forward to identify the bodies," said the lawyer, Wahplow Tan. He said he believes most of the victims were from Fujian, home region of many of the 150,000 Chinese in Britain. They often live in crowded quarters in London's Chinatown and work illegally in restaurants for low wages.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); **DEATHS** & OBITUARIES (90%); SMUGGLING (90%); INVESTIGATIONS (90%); **ARRESTS** (89%); **POLICE** FORCES (79%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (79%); IMMIGRATION (78%); HOMICIDE (78%); MANSLAUGHTER (78%); ALIEN SMUGGLING (78%); EXCISE & CUSTOMS (73%); BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS (70%); EXTREME TEMPERATURES (63%); CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE (62%); BICYCLES (60%)

Industry: AUTOMOBILE LEASING (78%); TRUCKING (78%); PORT AUTHORITIES (78%); BICYCLES (60%)

Geographic: ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS (90%); LONDON, ENGLAND (88%); DOVER, DE, USA (79%); NETHERLANDS (95%); UNITED KINGDOM (92%); CHINA (92%); ENGLAND (92%); BELGIUM (79%)

Load-Date: June 21, 2000