

BORDER PATROL TARGETS SMUGGLERS OF HUMAN MISERY

San Jose Mercury News (California)

MAY 7, 1996 Tuesday MORNING FINAL EDITION

Copyright 1996 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

Section: CALIFORNIA NEWS; Pg. 3B

Length: 456 words

Byline: Associated Press

Dateline: SAN DIEGO

Body

Pickup trucks, moving vans, even a portable toilet.

There are innumerable methods illegal immigrants use to gain a stealthy passage into the United States, but the vehicle crammed with people seems to be the method of choice lately.

Witness the recent rash of high-profile car wrecks and chases on Southern California roads and freeways. All told, 10 illegal immigrants were killed and dozens of others were injured in four such incidents during the past five weeks in Riverside and San Diego counties. All the vehicles were packed with illegal immigrants, mostly from Mexico.

Truck flips

The most recent incident occurred Sunday when a speeding truck carrying up to 30 illegal immigrants flipped onto its roof, partially smashing the cab and splintering the camper shell.

Three were injured, 10 were arrested and the rest got away on foot. The only person who remained hospitalized Monday was Florentino Gartica-Moso, 29, who was in good condition at Inland Valley Medical Center with a broken right leg, said hospital spokesman Dan Dredla.

Desperation job search

Human rights advocates say the accidents are fueled by immigrants' desperation to cross the border for jobs in America. But those in the U.S. Justice Department whose job it is to protect the nation's borders - from rank- and-file agents to the U.S. attorney - say human smugglers are at fault for preying on the desperate.

"The people who are to blame are the smugglers who have a total disregard for human life," U.S. attorney spokeswoman Ana Cobian said in a recent interview. "We cannot look the other way and not prosecute these people."

An 18-month-old beef-up of agents and equipment along the San Diego border, immigrants rights advocates say, has forced people to pay up to \$600 to smugglers to guide them over the border, usually on foot.

Once they are in the United States, the illegal immigrants are taken to a prearranged pickup point, where they are loaded into the truck, van or car.

Sometimes even more obscure means are used. In March, Border Patrol agents discovered 17 illegal immigrants crammed into a portable toilet being hauled behind a truck on Interstate 8.

BORDER PATROL TARGETS SMUGGLERS OF HUMAN MISERY

Pickup points are at out-of-the-way locations off a freeway, highway or road, said Ron Henley, spokesman for the U.S. **Border Patrol** in San Diego.

From there, the immigrants are transported either directly to Los Angeles or to "drop houses" in the San Diego area.

On the drive to Los Angeles, the vans must try to get past checkpoints set up by the U.S. **Border Patrol** on freeways, highways and secondary roads.

These checkpoints can be as much as 70 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico **border** or as much as 100 miles east of Los Angeles in the desert.

Graphic

Photo;

PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Police say this pickup truck was carrying up to 30 illegal immigrants when it flipped Sunday near Lake Elsinore, seriously injuring two.

[960507 CA 3B 3]

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (91%); IMMIGRATION (90%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL **BORDERS** (90%); SMUGGLING (90%); WOUNDS & INJURIES (90%); **BORDER** CONTROL (89%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (89%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (88%); TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (78%); ARRESTS (78%); **HUMAN** RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS (78%); BONE FRACTURES (76%); EMPLOYMENT SEARCH (72%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (71%); **HUMAN** RIGHTS (67%); INTERVIEWS (50%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (55%); US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (55%)

Industry: PICKUP TRUCKS (79%); TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (78%); MOTOR VEHICLES (74%); HOSPITALS (73%)

Geographic: SAN DIEGO, CA, USA (94%); LOS ANGELES, CA, USA (93%); RIVERSIDE, CA, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (97%); NORTH AMERICA (93%); MEXICO (92%)

Load-Date: October 23, 2002