

## **Hospital releases 2 of 5 stowaways**

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

May 29, 1993, Saturday, City Edition

Times Publishing Company

**Section:** TAMPA BAY AND STATE; Pg. 6B

**Length:** 370 words

**Byline:** RICHARD DANIELSON; MARLENE SOKOL

**Dateline:** TAMPA

### **Body**

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One of five West African **stowaways** pulled from a barge after a 22-day ordeal at sea remained in serious condition late Friday, according to officials at Tampa General **Hospital**.

The **stowaway**, who the **hospital** identified as Joseph Oford, was in the intensive care unit recovering from severe dehydration resulting from a **5,000**-mile voyage in a hot, dark machine room aboard the barge Pearle Jahn.

Authorities think the men sneaked aboard as the barge was being towed out of its last port of call, the Ivory Coast capital of Abidjan.

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The **stowaways** told officials they brought food and water for only 10 or 12 days and had to drink their own urine during the last part of the trip.

The five men, who appear to be in their 20s, were emaciated and badly dehydrated when paramedics and officials from the Coast Guard, Border Patrol and Immigration and Naturalization Service pulled them from the barge. A tugboat crew preparing to maneuver the barge into Tampa Electric Co.'s Big Bend docks in south Hillsborough County found the men.

Two were **released** from the **hospital** Thursday; a third was to be **released** late Friday. Oford and the last of the **stowaways**, who was in fair condition, remained hospitalized Friday.

Because the men carried no papers and were very weak when they arrived, officials with the **hospital** and the company that owns the barge had few details about their nationalities or identities Friday.

Gulfcoast Transit, a subsidiary of TECO Energy, will be responsible for housing, feeding and sending the men home. A TECO spokesman said Friday that the **stowaways** who had been **released** were being held at an undisclosed hotel.

"They being well-fed, well-housed," TECO's Mike Mahoney said. "We've purchased some clothing for them. Our primary focus is repatriation."

Sending the men home could take three days to five days, Mahoney said.

At Tampa General, a man who answered the telephone in the room of one of the **stowaways** said the patient would not speak to a reporter.

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"I'm responsible for him right now, and I'm not allowing any information out," said the man, who gave his name as Bill Pomajzl and referred all inquiries to Gulfcoast Transit.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); INTENSIVE CARE UNITS (78%); CITIZENSHIP (75%); BORDER CONTROL (75%); IMMIGRATION (73%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (69%); PARAMEDICS (68%); PARENT COMPANIES (67%)

**Company:** TAMPA ELECTRIC CO (69%); TAMPA ELECTRIC CO (69%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%)

**Organization:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (56%)

**Industry:** MARINE VESSELS (78%); INTENSIVE CARE UNITS (78%); **HOSPITALS** (72%); HOTELS & MOTELS (71%); HARBORS & PORTS (70%); PARAMEDICS (68%); ELECTRIC POWER INDUSTRY (67%)

**Geographic:** TAMPA, FL, USA (95%); COTE D'IVOIRE (79%); WESTERN AFRICA (58%)

**Load-Date:** May 29, 1993