

Two stowaways fall to their deaths from British planes

By Julie Hyland
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Two men died over the Christmas holidays after apparently falling from two different aeroplanes above Gatwick airport, near London. The two men are believed to be immigrants attempting to stowaway on planes by clinging to the undercarriage.

On December 24, the body of a young man—believed to be aged between 18-20 years old—was found on farmland on the Sussex-Surrey border, which lies under flight paths to the Britain's busy Gatwick and Heathrow airports. Police said his injuries were consistent with having fallen from an aircraft. It is not known how long his body lay in the field before it was discovered.

On Christmas Day morning, a Gatwick airport employee witnessed a man falling from a Mexico-bound British Airways Boeing 777 flight. Officials at Gatwick Airport said the man was seen to have fallen onto the runway just after the plane took off. His body was found at 9.20am. Gatwick's duty manager Mike Ingle said the man was a stowaway, "I guess it is fair to assume that if you are going to stowaway it is an obvious place to hide," he said. Flights were suspended for 50 minutes while police removed the body.

These two sad deaths at the height of the "season of goodwill" attracted little coverage in the media. The Blair Labour government, like its European counterparts, is carrying out a major assault on the right to asylum and is speeding up deportations. Heavy fines are now imposed against airlines and ferry services found to be carrying so-called "illegal" immigrants—even if unknowingly.

In the lead up to the holiday, a massive anti-immigrant operation was carried out on ferry services travelling into the UK, with all lorries and cars being searched. Ferry operator P&O Stena Line employed 40 security guards at Calais in France earlier

this month to check cars and coaches for immigrants being smuggled into the UK on vessels across the English Channel. The ferry operator, Britain's largest, has been fined £100,000 in the past eight months alone because of stowaways. P&O spokesman Vivienne Macey said that "as illegal immigrants are so desperate to get to Britain they could start using private cars to get round our checks on freight lorries." An Iraqi mother and her baby were amongst the first to be found in the new checks that began on December 6.

On Thursday December 20, a French magistrate charged a pregnant British woman with attempting to smuggle illegal immigrants into the UK in the trunk of her car. Sheena Tuckfield (37) denied the charges but was jailed for three months by the Calais court. Her 15-year-old daughter was placed in care of French social services until relatives retrieved her on Christmas Day. Security staff had found two Pakistani immigrants during a search of Tuckfield's car, as it queued to board a UK-bound ferry at Calais.

On December 19, an immigration sweep rounded up more than 40 suspected illegal immigrants at a Northumberland holiday park. The suspected immigrants were thought to be mainly Latvian and had been working at a nearby fish-processing factory.

The terrible deaths in June of 58 Chinese people, found suffocated to death in the back of a lorry at Dover port, highlighted the desperate situation facing asylum-seekers and refugees. The bodies of 54 men and four women were discovered in an airtight 18 metre-long container, lying sprawled amidst crates of tomatoes. Two people were still alive, but seriously ill. It is believed that they had been trapped inside the container for more than 18 hours, without any form of ventilation, during summer temperatures of up to 32C (90F).

Despite such tragic instances, the Blair government is pressing ahead with further anti-immigrant measures. Fines for transporting illegal immigrants are to be extended to rail freight operators on the Channel Tunnel. The Home Office has sought consultation on moves to fine UK operators £2,000 each for allowing illegal immigrants into the UK aboard freight trains.

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