

## Ring of steel against refugees in Calais

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Every day, thousands of refugees dare their lives to get from Calais to England via the Channel Tunnel. Gerrit Hes (58) of Reining Transport in Kolham visited "the Jungle", the refugee camp in the dunes of the French port of Calais.



The Jungle awakes. Men are washing themselves at one of the water taps in the camp. About 4.000 inhabitants risk their lives to get to England through the 50-kilometer Channel Tunnel. The camp is located on a motorway which is protected by a 4 meter high fence with barbed wire.

Managing director Gerrit Hes of Reining Transport parks his car just outside the camp. He wants to see the people that attack his trucks himself. A transport company has to pay a fine of 2.900 euros for every stowaway that is discovered by the British border control. The driver gets a fine as well of 300 euros. The total value of outstanding fines for Reining Transport is about 100.000 euros. "We have paid half of it. The other half is still under discussion".

Every hour 5 trains shuttles of 32 trucks each are leaving Calais. Reining Transports sends about 60 trucks per week to England. "Last year we had about 50 incidents of refugees trying to get in our trucks. Last week they even jumped on top of one of our trucks passing by slowly from a bridge. They cut a hole in the roof and hide themselves in the cargo. They were discovered during unloading in Manchester and ran away."



He looks at a man who limps past slowly. He has a dirty white bandage on his right leg. He is missing a part of his foot. Another fugitive is in a wheelchair. Hes: "Those escape attempts are extremely dangerous".

Five refugees from Iran tried to hop on one of the trains last Thursday. Hossin (29) is wearing gloves to protect his hands as he dares the jump. He speaks English well. That's why he wants to go to the other side. "I speak the language already. Moreover, it must be a very clever country. They are so rich, while they have almost no oil and gas to sell. These must be intelligent people."

He arrived in Calais after a long journey, traveling by truck and on foot. "I have been living here for three months. It is hell. There is little to eat and drink. We live on one meal a day that we get from volunteers. But there are also religious conflicts. We are Christians and there are also very fanatical Muslims in the camp. There is a group of Afghans threatening us and calling us 'non-believers'".

They are not the only ones who have gathered beneath an overpass. About 100 refugees are leaning against the concrete wall, waiting for that one train. Almost every evening groups of refugees are walking to the streets of Calais to the overpass to give it a try. With mixed success. David (39), a former officer in the Iranian army, rolls up the sleeve of his right hand. He points to a deep scratch. "Fence" He explains. Then he points to a bruise. "Police."



The refugees try to get on the trains and in the trucks in all possible ways. The Hungarian driver Tibor Turi (27) of Reining Transport feels nervous. He left Thursday morning at five o'clock from Kolham to Calais. He had to deal with refugees himself 2 years ago. He was sleeping in his truck about 20 kilometers from Kortrijk in Belgium. He was not even on the way to England. Police officers woke him up, because they discovered 5 refugees hiding in his trailer.



"Truck drivers are not allowed to stop within 200 kilometers from Calais, otherwise refugees can climb in the truck. They are everywhere. I've heard stories of colleagues who were attacked by the refugees. Sometimes you have no choice but to stop because they block the road by standing on the road or by using burning barricades".

"The police is on patrol, but there is not much they can do. They send the refugees away, but they are coming back immediately. Some of my colleagues are leaving their trucks to prevent the load and fight with the refugees. I am not going. Damage to the load can be recovered, but damage to me can't."

In Calais he sees refugees walking along the road. A tent is standing in a field close to the highway, flapping in the wind. However, he understand the refugees well. "They just want to have a better life. But they are also big risks". Not today. He drives his truck on to the train without any problems.

Transport companies may opt voluntarily for inspection of the cargo by employees of the French Eurotunnel. "We provide this service to avoid having to pay a penalty in England, because there are stowaways in trucks" explains spokesman John Keefe. A service that has taken off lately.

"In January there were still 600 refugees in Calais. Now between 4.000 and 5.000. This year a total of 50.0000 attempts have been made to enter the tunnel. Last Tuesday one guy successfully entered the tunnel. He made it, but ran right into the arms of the English police."

Eurotunnel is working on the construction of a steel fence to protect the trucks and trains. Kilometers of white fences with barbed wire, hundreds of cameras, motion sensors and security guards, officers and soldiers with dogs and guns should keep the refugees away. Keefe: "These fences are also used by NATO".

The costs are enormous. "This year alone 13 million. But the British government has finally decided to contribute. Recently there was an attempt of 2.000 refugees on one day. At that moment, apparently they realized that there was a problem". The measures seem to be working. "Last week the were no problems. But we have to deal with 5.000 people. Then anything can happen".

The distance between the camp and the tunnel is about 7 kilometers. Director Gerrit Hes smells the garbage and cooked food. "It's humiliating. Today the sun shines, but how will it be in the winter? I saw a young girl sleeping on the bare concrete floor. Alone."



The camp now has shops, a church and mosques. Volunteers provide medical care, food and clothing. "Today I have 500 vouchers for clothing" says volunteer Maya Konforin. "So that will be chaos".

The General Manager walks back to his car. He has seen enough. "It's terrible. But I have to run a business as well. Those penalties should be cancelled. It's like we are the criminals. We pay for incompetent French and British authorities. In this way, one of the founding principles of the European Union disappears: free movement of goods".

In the camp Ali (27) from Afghanistan has just arrived. He wears his cap backwards. He looks around. It's not beautiful. It's only temporary. Later he will be in England.

For today there is a planned protest march from the camp to the centre of Calais, to protest against the conditions in the jungle.