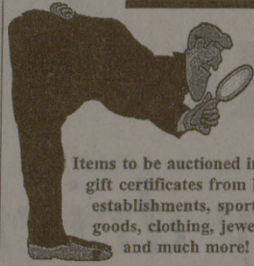


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NEWS

THE BATTALION

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Six killed after church bus hits cotton truck in Louisiana

By Barbara Powell  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLULAH, La. — A church bus taking senior citizens on a tour of historical sites slammed into a cotton-hauling tractor-trailer on the shoulder of a highway Monday, killing six people and injuring at least nine.

The bus driver survived the wreck and told investigators he fell asleep at the wheel before crashing into the truck, state police said. Someone on the bus yelled, awakening him just before impact, state police Trooper Julie Lewis said.

Fifteen people were on the bus when it crashed around 11 a.m. on Interstate 20 in northeastern Louisiana. The truck driver, who had pulled onto the shoulder to check his brakes, suffered minor head and neck injuries.

Thirteen passengers and two drivers were headed toward Vicksburg, Miss., on the second day of what was to have been a 16-day trip sponsored by their Baptist church in Texas, state police trooper Julie Lewis said.

The "senior ambassador tour" was to include visits to a Mercedes-Benz factory in

Alabama, the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and the Civil War battlefield in Gettysburg, Pa. Lewis said each passenger paid \$960 for the trip, sponsored by the First Baptist Church of Eldorado, Texas, a town of about 2,000 people some 160 miles northwest of San Antonio.

Lewis said the injured were taken to several hospitals in Mississippi and Louisiana, and at least one was injured critically. The bus driver, Kenneth J. Thomas, 66, of Eldorado, suffered moderate injuries. Identities of the passengers were being withheld while families were notified.

Carolyn Mayo, Eldorado city secretary, said the senior citizens on the bus included retired teachers and a retired nurse.

"This is a real active group — they have lots and lots of active members," said Mayo, adding that the group usually takes two trips each year.

The bus and the truck remained upright on the side of the road after the crash, but the front end of the bus was demolished — pushed up under the rear of the 18-wheeler's trailer, its engine driven back against the steering wheel by the

Fatal bus accident

A church bus from Texas crashed into a tractor-trailer Monday on eastbound Interstate 20 just west of Tallulah, La., killing six people and injuring at least nine.



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI

impact. Bales of cotton, seats from the bus, pillows and clothing littered the highway.

Emergency crews said no passenger was ejected but some were thrown partly out of the open side of the bus.

Traffic in the eastbound lanes of I-20 was shut down for about 20 miles between Tallulah and Waverly. One lane was opened after 5 p.m. Monday.

Tornado

Continued from page 1

"We've actually considered as a club to get with the city and see how feasible it would be to put (a system) in place," Walter said.

Marion Alcorn, head of A&M's Atmospheric Sciences' Department of Weather said meteorological experts predict that more severe weather can be expected due to shifts in specific atmospheric cells.

"Some people think that there will be more severe weather, but it's questionable," Alcorn said. "I don't think we're any more susceptible."

Alcorn said the peak season for tornadoes is in the springtime.

Despite the lack of sirens, A&M has detailed plans for dealing with severe weather.

"(The University) just purchased 45 weather radios. We are placing one in each hall on campus to inform people in hall of inclement weather," Meyer said. "Residence Life has a phone call out system — there is communication."

Brazos County has its own plans for dealing with severe weather in 2000 with the Interjurisdictional Emergency Management plan. Should severe weather occur, residents would be informed and advised by speaker-equipped vehicles, while rural residents would be informed door-to-door.

Meyer said residents can keep updated on severe weather by tuning into local television stations and radio stations.

Twins

Continued from page 1

Monday in the pediatric intensive care unit and remained in critical but stable condition.

"After coming back from the operating room last night the twins have had a remarkably stable course," Thomas said. "They have really thrown us no surprises in the process."

The boys, who shared an intricate connection of blood vessels but have separate brains, were in drug-induced comas to minimize the risk of brain swelling. They were expected to stay that way for the next two or three days, he said.

Both were on mechanical ventilators and require low doses of medication to keep their blood pressure within the normal range, Thomas said.

There was more good news after the boys had brain scans Monday morning: no hemorrhaging and minimal brain swelling. Said Thomas: "The neurosurgery team is quite

pleased with what they see."

The boys have been getting plenty of visitors, with members of the surgery team checking in on them and visits from two Egyptian nurses who have cared for them. Both parents were up late into the night and their mother accompanied them to the brain scans.

The boys were physically separated about 26 hours after they entered the operating room. Doctors then went to work covering the head wounds.

The boys don't have a bony covering for their brains, but skin expanders placed in their heads and thighs about five months ago created skin and tissue to cover the wounds.

Ahmed's wounds were completely covered by his own tissue, but Mohamed had small areas at each temple that were not covered by tissue and eventually will require grafts.

After fainting when he was told that his sons were separated, Ibrahim Mohammed Ibrahim cautiously approached the boys as he saw them apart for the first time.

"I think dad was so overwhelmed that he almost hesitated at the doors and took the time to get in — as if gathering himself before he walked into the room," Thomas said.

The boys' mother, Sabah Abu el-Wafa had cried upon hearing the boys were separate. She was "clearly" moved as she looked at her two separate sons, Thomas said.

The boys were born on June 2, 2001, by Caesarean section in Egypt. The Dallas-based World Craniofacial Foundation, a nonprofit group that helps children with deformities of the head and face, arranged to bring the boys to Dallas in June 2002 for an evaluation.

The intricate operation had been in the planning stages for months. They will need additional reconstructive surgery in coming years.

The quality of life the boys can achieve will be the true measure of success, said Jeffrey Wisoff, director of pediatric neurosurgery at NYU Medical Center.

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