

Bus plunge in Ozarks fatal to 20

JASPER, Ark. -A tour bus plunged off a twisting mountain road in the darkness early Thursday and tumbled 50 feet down a steep, wooded ravine. The driver and 11 passengers from Texas were killed and 13 were injured.

The survivors, all from the Dallas area, were treated at Boone County Hospital in Harrison, north of Jasper in the rugged Ozark plateau area of northwestern Arkansas.

State troopers speculated that the brakes may have failed at a spot on Arkansas 7 known locally as "Suicide Curve."

Originally, the passenger list indicated that 34 people were aboard. However, authorities later determined that Enola Sheely, one of those listed, canceled her trip because of an injury.

Capt. Billy Bob Davis, commander of the Arkansas State Police at Harrison; said, "It looked as though the brakes failed."

Central Texas Buslines owned and operated the bus and is a member of National Trailways Bus System, a group of more than 50 independently owned motor coach carriers.

ROSS GOODWILL, vice president of Central Texas Buslines, Inc., went to Harrison to confer with authorities. He said the brakes on the bus had been checked last week.

Newton County Sheriff Ray Watkins and Coroner C. J. Easley said it appeared that the driver of the bus tried to use the ravine to stop the runaway. They speculated that the driver, Jimmy Thigpen, gave up his life in an effort to save others.

"I tell you one thing, he was one hell of a bus driver" Easley was quoted in

The twisted wreckage of a tour bus is hauled from a stretch of Arkansas highway known as "Suicide Curve."

the Dallas Morning News. "He laid that bus in on an embankment to stop it. He eased it in there on an angle, not straight on. If he hadn't done that, all of them would have been killed."

THE BUS HAD BEEN chartered by Mrs. R.W. Jacobs of Irving, Tex. In Dallas, bus company spokesman Keith Hopper said the travelers apparently were not affiliated with any organization.

From her hospital bed, Jessie Morgan, 67, of Irving, Tex., recalled that the bus had started "making a grinding noise. Then it ran out of control."

"The bus started swinging all around. We were going all around on that two-lane," she said, "Thank God there were no cars coming."

We were all praying, and some of us

must have been crying, because we were so scared. It hitting things. It threw me up in the air. I must have passed out for a little while, and when I came to I could still move my legs, but I was in pain."

She suffered broken ribs and cuts on her arms and legs and was listed in satisfactory condition.

"I WAS STUCK IN between the seats," she said. "I caught a hand that was just swinging there. The lady was in the seat behind me, and I felt her hand. It was just hanging there. Oh, it was so dark."

It took rescue crews hours to remove all the victims from the wreckage.

The National Transportation Safety Board sent a four-person team of investigators from Washington to determine the cause of the crash.