Men Die When Bridge Equipment Collapses

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The men must have felt privileged to work on the largest public works project in the state’s history, the building of an interstate highway bridge, but for several, their excitement turned to tragedy. Three ironworkers, aged 30, 42 and 44 years old, died. Five more were injured. The injured included three ironworkers and two operating engineers. One of the injured also died later in a trauma center.

It happened during the collapse of a launching gantry. That’s a framework of steel trusses that span the distance between two elevated bridge piers. It lies horizontally and works like a crane to lift pre-cast pieces of roadway into place.

All four men who died had been doing tasks to help re-position the launching gantry when the 1. 8-million-pound piece of equipment collapsed. Rescue personnel arrived within minutes, but three of the workers were pronounced dead at the scene. All had been wearing regulation protective gear.

The exact cause of collapse was not discovered during the investigation, but it may have been that the machine was not sitting on completely flat ground, throwing it off balance.

Source: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 2004-05