

"He hit the bridge 'just wrong'," observed one Indiana State Police trooper at the scene of a fatal Interstate 65 accident early on the morning of Friday, December 21.

ISP officers with the Versailles post were dispatched to the Austin/Crothersville exit via 9-1-1 calls from motorists who witnessed the tragic crash around 2:30 a.m. that Friday.

From preliminary studies of the accident scene, the 47-year-old man from Tennessee had been northbound on I-65 with a full load of wood pallets inside his trailer. Ice and snow that had accumulated on the overhead bridge that carries the two northbound lanes just south of the exit ramp as well as high wind gusts were blamed for causing the man to lose control of his rig.

As the tractor-trailer climbed the bridge, it struck a guardrail and the concrete bridge. The collision point was, in the words of a state trooper, "...just in the wrong place." The rig "climbed" the bridge and guardrail and gained access to the steep embankment between the two I-65 bridges.

The rig traveled down the embankment at a high speed. When the cab, or tractor, hit the concrete barrier that outlines the southbound lane under the bridges, it stopped. The trailer did not, however, continuing on and over the cab, smashing the tractor and killing the driver. It finally came to rest partially dangling over the concrete barrier. Pallets and pieces of the tractor-trailer were strewn on the lanes of U.S. Highway 31.

The victim's name was not released by the ISP on Friday until family members were contacted. Northbound I-65 was closed for several hours. After the interstate was re-opened around 10 a.m., state troopers closed U.S. 31 while the clean-up and accident reconstruction work continued. Members of the Vernon Township Volunteer Fire Department remained at the scene as well to assist.

The Crothersville-based department went into action during the clean-up. A small fire sparked from remaining fuel in the tractor and was extinguished by the firemen.

Property damage was not estimated.