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## May 27, 2002 – I-40 bridge collapse kills 14

Aug 22, 2016

### **M**ay 27, 2002 — I-40 bridge collapse kills 14

A 600-foot span of the Interstate 40 bridge over the Arkansas River near Webbers Falls collapsed, killing 14, after it was hit by a barge. A fisherman at the scene told state investigators the barge was moving straight and true down the 400-foot-wide navigation channel but suddenly veered west, shearing one of the bridge's piers.

The victims were in vehicles whose drivers didn't see the collapsed bridge or were unable to stop before driving into the chasm left by the missing bridge sections. At least five survived crashes caused by the collapse that occurred about 7:45 a.m.

Newalla fishermen Alton Wilhoit and Kirk Washburn used their boats to rescue several in the aftermath. A fisherman fired a flare that was seen by a truck driver, who stopped his vehicle and blocked I-40 traffic in front of the collapsed area.

The Coast Guard later determined that tugboat Capt. William Joe Dedmon violated federal law when he was allowed to pilot the vessel in spite of a lack of sleep.

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Interstate 40 traffic was forced to make long detours—about 12 miles for westbound traffic and about 40 miles for east-bound—but a new bridge was opened on July 29, just over two months later.