

**Volume 11**

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**Great Halifax Explosion of 1917**

**Lead: In December 1917, Halifax, the capital of Canada's maritime province of Nova Scotia was nearly leveled by the greatest man-made explosion prior to Hiroshima.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Established as a military outpost in 1754, by the turn of the twentieth century Halifax had become one most important commercial centers on Canada's east coast. During World War I, ships, thousands of them, crowded the city's**

harbor and narrow channel, the staging area for east-bound convoys bringing much needed supplies and munitions to the allies fighting in Europe.

Early in the morning of December 6, 1917 *Mont Blanc*, a French freighter entered the harbor from the Atlantic, with a cargo of 2300 tons of the explosive lyddite, 200 tons of TNT, gun cotton and hundreds of drums of highly flammable benzol. At the other end of the harbor *Imro*, a Norwegian freighter bound for New York to ferry relief supplies to war-ravaged Belgium, headed down the channel for the sea. There commenced a delicate dance that would have been comical if not for the

**tragic outcome. The two ships kept trying to turn away from each other, but each time succeeded only in veering to each other's path.**

**The result was that *Imro* plowed ten feet into the bow of *Mont Blanc*, bursting many of the drums and sending benzol cascading down on top of the lyddite and TNT. *Imro* then reversed propellers and in a shower of sparks, yanked itself out of the side of the wounded *Mont Blanc*. There was no way to reach the anchor of the stricken vessel because of the breach and no time to open the petcocks and sink the blazing ship which, slowly, inevitably drifted toward the crowded docks of the doomed city. Next time: disaster and relief.**

**At the University of Richmond,  
this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

**Baker, Howard. “When Hell Came to Halifax,” *History Today* 52 (12, December, 2002):42-43.**

<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/mma/AtoZ/HalExpl.html>

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