

Volume 11

Number 049

Great Halifax Explosion, 1917 - II

Lead: The chance collision of two merchant ships and a subsequent huge explosion in December 1917 nearly destroyed the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Canadians and the world helped bring it back.

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

Content: In the early morning hours of December 6, 1917, *Imro*, a Norwegian ship headed to pick up relief supplies for the suffering in Belgium, sliced into the side of the French freighter, *Mont Blanc*, in the

narrow Halifax harbor channel leading to the open sea. *Mont Blanc* was load with tons of explosives and extremely flammable benzol. The encounter loosed the benzol and sparks, caused by scraping metal, set it ablaze. The ship drifted into the crowded docks of Halifax and at about 9:06 *Mont Blanc* blew up. The ship simply disintegrated and sent a fireball and mushroom cloud miles into the air.

The shock wave then began to devastate the harbor and city. Ships were tossed about, locomotives thrown into the air. As the wave moved up the hill into Halifax very little could withstand its incredible power. Schools, factories, churches

were flattened. Two hundred orphans were instantly killed when the shock crushed their orphanage, as were 400 worshippers in St. Mark's Anglican church. Then all the white hot debris tossed in the air began to come back down, igniting fires through out the city center. Then the tidal wave roared back into the vacuum caused by the explosion.

In the end, by conservative official estimates, nearly 2000 were killed and over 9000 injured, but these were only the bodies found. Canada and the world responded with an outpouring of aid and within a few short years Halifax was restored from the largest man-made explosion until the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945.

**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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