

Death Toll Over Two Thousand in Halifax Explosion

On December 6th, 1917, two ships in Halifax, Nova Scotia collided, destroying many parts of the city and killing around 2,000 people and injuring more than 9,000.

This happened when two ships, *Imo* and *Mont Blanc*, collided in the middle of the harbour at around 8:40 in the morning. *Imo* was heading out of Halifax while *Mont Blanc* was heading in. *Mont Blanc* was holding 2,653 tonnes of heavy artillery, ammunition and other explosives.

When *Imo* was heading out, it was going to fast and was not on the right side of the harbour. He was trying to avoid a tugboat, but he did not know that *Mont Blanc* was there. Both ships blew their whistle, but neither of them got out of the way until the last second. *Imo* collided with *Mont Blanc*, causing it too spark and start a fire. The crew of *Imo*, were all French. Knowing that they had all the heavy explosions on board, they had no choice but to abandon ship. When they reached shore, they tried to warn everyone, but couldn't speak any English. The ship *Stella Maris* tried to put out the fire aboard *Mont Blanc* using the onboard hose. Thirty-five minutes later, the ship exploded causing the biggest artificial explosion ever.

The blast cause an 18 metre tidal wave and a pressure wave which demolished buildings, trees and other ships. It damaged buildings almost two kilometres away from the crash site.

Halifax was a booming city due to World War 1. Many soldiers left Canada from Halifax due to its water

access. It was also a city for immigrants to come to from Europe.

Imo was in a rush because they were late for a pick up of supplies in New York. The previous night, *Imo* was set to depart at 7:00 p.m., but the coal supplier was late. The antisubmarine nets were deployed every night at 7:30, so they were stationed there until morning. Shortly after 7:30 the next morning, *Imo* was ready to depart. At the same time, *Mont Blanc* was just arriving.



People try to find people in the wreckage.

“It was just horrible. There was an explosion loud enough to make people go deaf,” a local resident said.

“I live about 15 kilometres from the crash site and all you could see was thick, black smoke. I'm sure glad I live this far away.”

1,600 people died immediately after the explosion, tidal wave and building collapses. 6,000 people had life-threatening injuries, while 3,000 did not. 13,630 houses were completely destroyed and 25,000 people and minor damages. Damage costs are estimated at US \$35 million.

December 6th, 1917 will never be forgotten and those who were lost shall not be forgotten either.

Troy Willard