

BECAUSE some one man or several blundered, or a piece of machinery broke down, because sheer misadventure steered two ships towards each other from the ends of the earth, the proud old city of Halifax was laid in ruins in an instant of time. A thousand of her people were slain and not with sword; as many more were maimed and wounded. Millions of money will not repair the damage. Nothing can make good the total of human suffering endured.

Halifax is a long, thin city, built on the western shore of a great harbor. The city is really two cities divided by the huge hill on which the citadel is built. The South End, as it is called, is the residential portion; the North End is industrial. There are the wharves, the dry-dock, the railway station, the factories, the main barracks, the naval department. This quarter was the home mainly of the working class. Their houses were of wood, cheaply constructed. Here is the wasp-waist passage between the outer harbor and the inner, which is known as Bedford Basin. This passage or strait has a deep, narrow channel. Here was the scene of the calamity which struck Halifax like a comet on Thursday morning, December the sixth, 1917.

It was a morning of unusual and surprising beauty. There was no snow on the ground. The air was kind and friendly as in summer. Nothing in sky or on earth portended disaster; but disaster was on its way. Men were getting down to their offices; the morning trains were coming in at North Street Station; the children were assembled in their schools.

Over the still, glassy surface of the harbor, a French ship, the "Mont Blanc," was proceeding cautiously towards the Narrows. She had four thousand tons of T. N. T. in her hold and a deck load of picric acid and benzol. She was to anchor in the Basin out of harm's way. The Dock Yard officials had a special eye on her, as they must have on all such dangerous visitors.

At the predestined hour, the Belgian relief ship, "Imo," conspicuously lettered in red, as is the fashion of such ships, had left her anchorage in the Basin and was proceeding outwards to sea. Both were in charge of regular certificated Halifax pilots. As they neared and neared, those looking on noticed that the "Imo" was disregarding the old established, immutable rules of the road at sea.

About a quarter before nine, the two ships met practically in the Narrows, and the "Imo" rammed the "Mont Blanc" somewhere about the engine-room. Some say the steering-gear went wrong at the critical moment; others that the usual signals were misunderstood.

Almost immediately after the collision, the "Mont Blanc" was seen to be on fire. A tall column of smoke rose like a pillar of cloud through the still morning air. Onlookers remarked that there was a ship on fire in the Basin. The crew of the "Mont Blanc," well knowing what they had underneath their feet, took to their boats and rowed like madmen for the eastern shore, where the town of Dartmouth stands, opposite to Halifax. The abandoned ship, burning fiercely, drifted towards Pier 8, as it is called, a long, double wharf, where the square-rigged ships load deals for the U. K. Long freight trains bear the sawn lumber from the mills to the wharf.

One observer of the collision was the captain of one of H. M. ships in the harbor, for nothing takes place in the vicinity of a British man-of-war that is not noted and reported. He saw the danger and ordered his commander away in a boat, to board the derelict, anchor her, and get the fire under control. They never reached their goal. Before they got near the "Mont Blanc" she drifted into Pier 8 and blew up.

AN eye-witness on the citadel curiously watching the huge column of black smoke suddenly saw an immense upward spurt of red flame. And that was the last of the "Mont Blanc."

There came a burst of thunder sound. Those who have experienced earthquakes thought they were caught in another. The ground rocked, walls swayed and fell, roofs collapsed. There was only one explosion, but most Haligonians heard two reports: first a deep, awful, subterranean rumbling, for earth carries sound more quickly than air; the second was like the sound of an enormous blast, as when the engineers of the Ocean Terminals explode tons of dynamite in the cuttings.

Immediately all over the peninsula, in every dwelling, shop, factory, office, bank, warehouse, there followed the sound of shattering glass, the splintering of wooden doors, shutters, as locks were burst and hinges smashed, where the whole fabric did not fall in a heap.

HALIFAX IN RUINS

Story by an Eye-Witness who lives in Halifax and who records in haste what he was able to focus of the Tragedy up till December 9.

By ARCHIBALD MacMECHAN

The effect of the vast, sudden interference with the air was practically the same as if an earthquake had shaken Halifax to the ground.

To those who heard those awful sounds two or three similar ideas occurred at once. Most thought, "At last." German ships were shelling the city from out-

side the harbor. One! two!—When and where would the third fall? Or else it was "An air raid." Instinctively people ran into the open to look for the Zeppelins, or took to the cellar to escape the shells.

Then quiet reigned again. There were no more terrifying sounds. Neighbors began to confer in the streets and make inquiries as to damage and escapes. They also noted with surprise that everyone's house was wrecked as well as their own. In the South End people were calm and unexcited; they were taken unawares, but they were not flurried. Annoyance at the inexplicable damage done was perhaps uppermost, and curiosity as to the origin of the trouble. Blasting at the Terminals and the roar of big guns at practice have been so common here that it takes a great deal to put Haligonians in a panic.

The true story of the explosion soon spread mysteriously from lip to lip. Then practical people began to make repairs. They began to sweep up the broken glass and fallen plaster. If they were lucky enough to have some lumber they began boarding up their windows. If not they put up mats, rugs, blankets, roofing felt, cloth and battens—anything to keep out the weather. This was only true of the South End. It was some time before the city realized the disaster which had befallen it.

FAR different was the scene in what the local papers called "the busy North End."

There the incalculable force of the suddenly compressed air had blasted the whole quarter flat. Every house was level with the ground and every tree. The cheap, wooden houses, which covered the hillside, simply collapsed in a moment like houses built of cards. In an instant of time, before the unfortunates could realize the peril, their houses had fallen on their heads. One poor man hunting for his wounded wife from hospital to hospital, said, "I was sitting at breakfast, and the two ends went out of the house." Men, women and children were killed instantly by the concussion, and were thrown yards away from their homes. Others were torn to pieces, heads from bodies, limbs from trunk. Others were blinded by the pelting showers of broken glass, or strangely gashed and rent. In all conceivable ways was this poor human frame rent, and broken, and shredded and crushed. The houses collapsed, killing whole families at once, or heavy timbers pinned down living and injured. Their fate was the most fearful for—the wreckage took fire.

In an instant of time twenty thousand people, half the population of Halifax, were rendered destitute. Those who escaped were homeless; they had only what they stood up in. The case of the little children was the most pitiful. Richmond School came down and killed a hundred: the little white crushed faces could be seen through the timbers. Fifty more were killed at St. Joseph's School. All but two perished with devoted matrons in the wreck of the Protestant Orphanage.

Across the harbor the same things happened, but the loss of life was much slighter. Perhaps forty Micmac Indians were killed on their reservation at Tuft's Cove. In Dartmouth itself, twenty-five were actually killed. The flying fragments of the ammunition ship killed many. The plight of the aged, the sick, the infants, the bed-ridden, the crippled, the nursing mothers, the pregnant, cannot be described.

In the immediate neighborhood of Pier 8, the damage was greatest. The pier itself was simply abolished; hundreds of freight cars with their loads were upset, torn apart, and their contents scattered. The station roof came down, killing or injuring all but two. The road was completely blocked. Traffic was suspended. All through the city the trams and telephone service were at an end.

(Must send this to catch the 7.30 mail to-night, Dec. 9. Will send on conclusion to-night or to-morrow morning.)—A.M.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the inconceivable force of such an explosion as well as the case of the "Niobe." As guard-ship, she is anchored head and stern by heavy cables, and also moored to the wharf. Each link is of inch-and-a-quarter iron, in section. The explosion produced a miniature tidal wave eight feet high, which tore her sixty yards out of her place. The wooden deckhouses came down, killing fifteen men. The same wave swept the wharves and put out

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