

# The **ABC's** of the **HALIFAX EXPLOSION**

*Courtesy of Owen McCarron*

**A** is for **Aimé LeMedec**  
Who was captain of the Mont-Blanc which was coming to Halifax to join a convoy. Her final destination was to be in Bordeaux, France, to deliver a cargo of munitions.

**B** is for **Bedford Basin**  
A large body in the north end of Halifax Harbour, it was not an unusual sight to see ships of all shapes and sizes awaiting deployment to the war zone overseas.

**C** is for **Collision**  
Had it not been for some serious navigational irregularities, the collision could have been avoided. But it did happen...causing the largest man-made explosion before the atomic bomb.

**D** is for **Devastation**  
The north end of the city, known as Richmond, lay in total ruin. Homes, Factories, schools, churches, and commercial buildings were all included in this thunderous disaster.

**E** is for **Explosives**  
The lethal cargo being carried by the Mont-Blanc included: picric acid, lyddite, TNT, gun cotton and benzole. All of which made the captain and crew very nervous.

**F** is for **Fire Department**  
Fire had broken out all over the explosion area; the Halifax Fire Department was quick to respond. Nine of their own would pay the ultimate price in the line of duty.

**G** is for **Gallantry**  
There were many heroes that day when people, from all walks of life, came together in a common cause. G is also for Gravesend Bay where the Mont-Blanc was loaded with explosives.

**H** **is for Halifax**  
The capital of Nova Scotia, Halifax was a city of approximately 50,000 people. H is also for Halifax Harbour, the second largest harbour in the world and for Haakon From, captain of the IMO.

**I** **is for IMO**  
A Belgian relief ship, she was to sail, under convoy, to New York to pick up supplies for war-torn Belgium. She had left her moorings in Bedford Basin after being loaded with coal.

**J** **is for Judicial**  
Proceedings would eventually be entered into assess blame for the tragic incident. The hearing would be held in the old Halifax courthouse by the Wreck Commissioners.

**K** **is for Kaiser**  
Kaiser Wilhelm was the emperor of Germany whom many blamed for the incident since, they felt, he was responsible for starting the war in the first place.

**L** **is for Lost Lives**  
The loss of life was nothing short of horrendous...almost 2000 people were killed, though some believe the estimates were low. Thousands more were injured, many others were blinded.

**M** **is for Mont-Blanc**  
Which was launched in 1899, as a cargo ship, was purchased, in 1915, by the Compagnie Generale Transatlantique and pressed into immediate service to aid in the war effort.

**N** **is for Narrows**  
In Halifax Harbour, midway between the dockyard and Bedford Basin, was .4 to .5 miles wide, sufficient for two large ships to pass alongside without incident. Apparently not this time.

# O

## **is for 6,000**

People were left homeless. Their houses either went up in flames, were flattened or simply disintegrated and many ended up living in tents in wintry conditions.

# P

## **is for Pier 6**

After the Mont-Blanc was struck on the starboard side by the IMO, she drifted across the Narrows, coming to rest up against Peir 6. The ship was on fire...time was running out.

# Q

## **is for Questions**

Who could possibly done such a thing? Why? Was it sabotage? Was it someone living amongst us? Friends? Neighbours? Answers were needed. Quickly.

# R

## **is for Relief**

Trains and ships from Massachusetts were the first to arrive. That is why we send them a Christmas tree every year as a “thank you”. More help would come from all over the world.

# S

## **is for Sixth**

December 6, 1917 is the day to remember when Halifax received a near knock-out punch...a terrible day in our city's history. But Halifax would rise again.

# T

## **is for Tidal Wave**

Its force threw the IMO, which had been only slightly damaged, up onto the Dartmouth shore as well as wiping out an entire M'kmaq encampment in Tuft's Cove. It claimed lives, too.

# U

## **is for U-boats**

German submarines, which lurked in the cold Atlantic waters off Halifax, were also suspect for their involvement in this tragedy. As well, they targeted and sank merchant marine ships.

# V

## **is for Vince Coleman**

Who was credited with saving many lives by telegraphing a warning to a Halifax-bound train, loaded with passengers, about the impending danger. He sacrificed his life.

# W

## **is for World War 1**

At the time of the explosion, World War 1, which began in 1914, was raging on in Europe. It would continue until 1918. This was to be the war to end all wars. Obviously not.

# X

## **is for X-Ray**

An X-ray outfit, together with a qualified technician, was just one of the many pieces of medical equipment sent by the Red Cross in Massachusetts, to be used at a base hospital here.

# Y

## **is for Young and Old**

People of all ages would perish...many in their own homes with their families, children in school, many at church in prayer, others at their work places. None would be exempt.

# Z

## **is for Zero Hour**

It was about 20 minutes after the two ships collided that the nightmare was to begin...scant seconds before 9:05 am, minutes after most Haligonians were beginning another regular day.

