



## The Halifax Explosion

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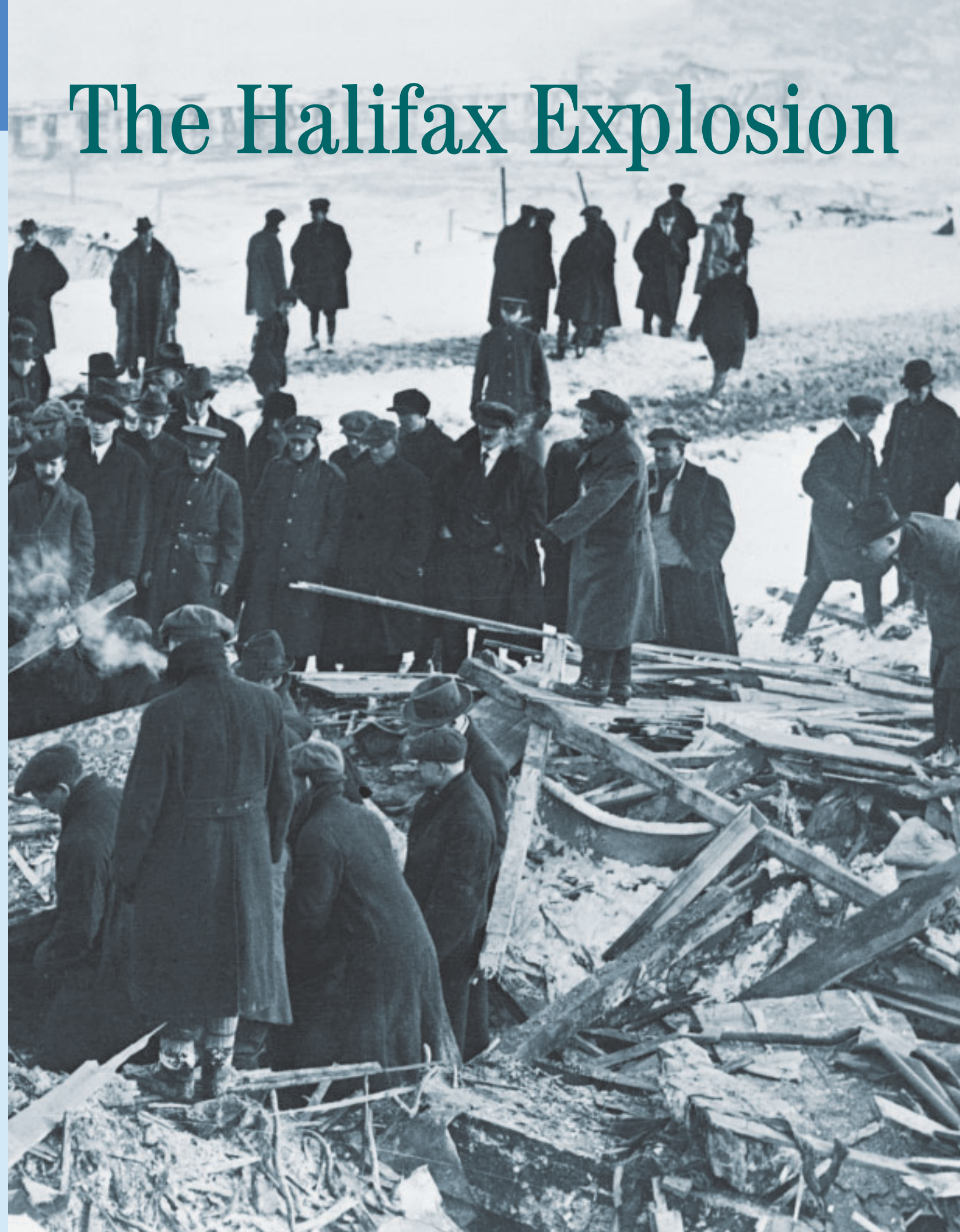
Sidebar with Bulleted List

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## December 1917

In Europe, World War I was at its height. In Canada, Halifax was a bustling place. As the biggest port on Canada’s Atlantic coast, the city was a jumping-off point for supply ships going to Europe. Extra rail lines had to be built for the busy shipping traffic. Additional housing went up for soldiers and their families. People seeking new jobs flocked to the city.

After striking the *Mont Blanc*, the *Imo* ran aground on the Dartmouth shore. The captain, pilot, and five crew members were killed.

On the morning of December 6, the French ship *Mont Blanc* was coming into Halifax Harbour. It was about to join a convoy headed for England. The *Mont Blanc* carried 3000 tonnes of explosives. At the same time, a Norwegian ship, the *Imo*, was headed out of the harbour. Incredibly, the two ships collided at a place called the Narrows, just outside the Bedford Basin. The *Imo* struck the *Mont Blanc* on the bow and set it on fire.



Women in Halifax walked to work the day after the explosion destroyed large parts of the city.



More than 1600 homes were completely destroyed by the blast, and 12 000 homes were damaged.

The *Mont Blanc*’s captain and crew immediately abandoned ship, as they were sure it would explode at any moment. Instead, the blazing vessel drifted across the harbour and came to rest at a pier in the north end of the city. Crowds of people, including many children on their way to school, gathered to gaze at the spectacular sight. They did not realize the danger they were in.

At 9:05 a.m., the *Mont Blanc* exploded in a huge flash of light. The blast levelled more than two square kilometres of the city. Every pane of glass in the city shattered. Flying shards of glass blinded many people.

Rescue efforts began at once. Thousands of troops went to work, and several ships were converted to floating hospitals. The city of Boston sent medicine, doctors, and public safety workers to Halifax by train to help. Many lives were saved, but more than 2000 people died and about 9000 were injured.

Today, the Memorial Bell Tower at Fort Needham overlooks the explosion site. Every December 6, at 9:00 a.m., the bells ring in memory of all those who suffered in the Halifax Explosion.

### Fast Facts

- Buildings in more than 2 km<sup>2</sup> of Halifax were flattened.
- The blast shattered windows over 100 km away.
- The blast was heard in Prince Edward Island.
- About 6000 people were left homeless.
- Total damage amounted to \$35 million in repairs.