

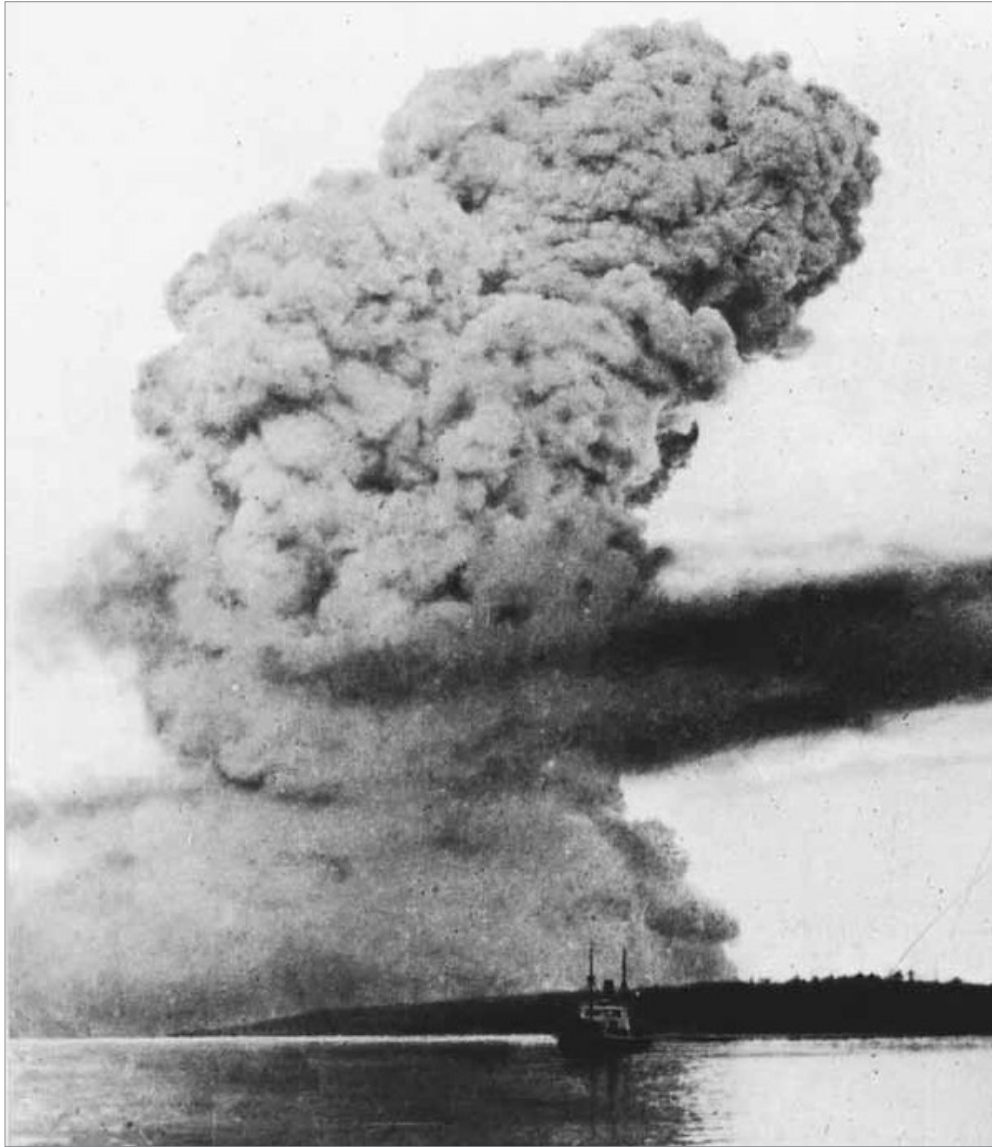
Chapter 3

LIKE ALL THUNDERS ROLLED INTO ONE



The apocalyptic blast ripped through the city with a force and fury beyond imagination. At approximately 9:05 a.m., 3,121 tons of iron and steel exploded into millions of fragments, flying for miles in all directions. Houses swayed, straightened up, and then collapsed, like houses made of cards. Factories toppled and churches crumbled. Ships, trains, and automobiles were hurled about like toys. Roads were obliterated and railway tracks were torn from the earth. Trees and telephone poles snapped like matchsticks. A torrent of debris was scattered everywhere. The blast shattered every window for miles around, and stiletos of glass flew through the air, ripping through flesh and lodging in eyeballs. Gas lines ruptured, and fire from hundreds of stoves spilled out onto the heaps of kindling created by the blast. Greasy black rain fell from the sky, and shrapnel pelted down over the ruins for several minutes. The harbour became a seething cauldron. Its floor split open,

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The resulting mushroom cloud from the explosion, likely taken from the Bedford Basin only moments after the blast.

propelling boulders up from the deep. The force of the blast created a tidal wave, which swamped the shore. Small ships were swallowed and spat back out, and large vessels were ripped from their moorings and flung onto shore.

When it was all over, at least 1,900 people were dead, 9,000 were injured, and hundreds were permanently blinded. Hundreds of victims were buried beneath the wreckage, and fires raged throughout the area. The communities of Richmond, Tufts Cove, and Turtle Grove were laid waste, and Halifax

HALIFAX EXPLOSION



The Halifax City Hall clock has remained stuck at 9:05 since the day of the explosion.

and Dartmouth were devastated. Electricity, gas, telephone, and telegraph lines were all severed, leaving the city completely crippled.

The situation in the harbour was desperate. Thick black smoke hung over the water, ravaged ships drifted helplessly on the currents, and bodies and debris of every

kind littered the shore. Of the forty-five vessels in the harbour, almost all sustained serious damage and extensive casualties. The *Stella Maris*, being closest to the *Mont-Blanc*, had taken the full force of the blast. Amazingly, the little tug was not demolished but blown downstream, where it came to rest near the dry dock. It was stripped of its smokestack and spars, but still intact. Five crewmembers survived, including William Knickerson and Walter Brannen, who had been driven below deck by the blast. But Captain Horatio Brannen and eighteen of his crew died instantly.

Commander Tom Triggs was also killed in the blast. Miraculously, however, a few of his crew in *Highflyer's* whaler survived. The *Imo* was hurled onto the Dartmouth shore and her superstructure demolished. And Captain Hakkon From and Pilot William Hayes were both killed.

Aboard the *Niobe*, Fred Longland scrambled for cover as a hail of boiler tubes, rivets, and jagged steel plates hammered the deck. The crew dove into ventilator shafts and beneath lifeboats in an effort to dodge the deadly storm of flying debris. When the tidal wave hit, the massive vessel was ripped from its moorings and heaved high into the air before being slammed back to the surface. When it was all over, the main deck was a disaster. All four of the ship's funnels were

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Piers 7, 8, and 9 were completely obliterated by the blast.

demolished and its superstructure destroyed. In all, nineteen men, including Albert Mattison and the crew of the steam pinnacle, were killed. Dozens were critically wounded.

The *Hilford*, which was at Pier 9, was blown out of the water and severely damaged. The *Curaca*, which had been unloading horses at Pier 8, was blown right across the harbour and sank at Tufts Cove. The *Calonne*, which had been loading horses at Pier 9, was ravaged and thirty-six of her crew killed, while the British vessel *Picton*, which had a load of munitions on board, was badly damaged and set ablaze.

In addition, the Dockyard, Naval College, and several wharves were pulverized. For the first time in its long history, Halifax Harbour, one of the busiest, most vital ports in the British Empire, was paralyzed.

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When Charles Duggan came to, he was onshore. He had no idea how long he had been unconscious, where he was, or how he got there. The last thing he remembered was watching