

## HALIFAX EXPLOSION.

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If the Service at large knows as little about the Halifax explosion as I do about the details of that which took place at Archangel, a slight account of the events on and following December 6th, 1917, at the port of Halifax may prove interesting.

On that day the French steamer *Mont Blanc*, laden with high explosives, was entering harbour to join up with a British convoy. She was passing through the narrows between the harbour and the Bedford Basin, and at the same time the *Imo*, a Belgian relief ship in ballast, was passing down the harbour. Owing to some misunderstanding on the part of the pilots a collision took place. Neither ship was much damaged by the impact, but the heat generated ignited some drums of benzol (or some similar spirit) on the deck of the former ship. H.M.S. *Highflyer*, one of the vessels on convoy escort service, was at anchor close to the place of the collision, and Commander Triggs<sup>1</sup> of that ship, with a party of officers and men, were sent immediately to render such assistance as was possible. A salvage tug, the *Stella Maris*, and probably another vessel also attempted to take the burning vessel in tow, but before anything of importance could be accomplished the fire, having caused the explosion of some of the drums communicated with part of her cargo in the shape of gunpowder, and this caused the detonation of some 3,000 tons of T.N.T., producing one of the most terrible explosions which has ever taken place.

The actual time of the explosion as evidenced by the stoppage of the Town Hall clock was 9.6 a.m. The crew of the *Mont Blanc* had taken to their boats upon the outbreak of fire, but almost all who were in the vicinity of the ship were destroyed by the explosion, which practically annihilated everything within a radius of some hundred yards and shattered everything within a circle of a mile or more.

I was at the time Port Convoy Officer in Canada, and my headquarters had been moved about a fortnight before from Sydney Cape Breton to Halifax. The first convoy from Halifax had left on November 21st, and the C.-in-C. had sailed for Bermuda the following day.

At 9 o'clock that morning I had just finished breakfast. It was not unpleasant after three years of the North Sea and Scapa to find oneself in a well-appointed dining room, and to know that one could enjoy the good things there set forth without any qualms induced by thoughts of food shortage. It was, however, well that I resisted any temptation to linger. At 9.10 a.m. I was accustomed to leave my house for the office, and therefore at 9 o'clock exactly I left the dining room where

<sup>1</sup> Received posthumous award of Albert Medal.

I had been seated, facing a large plate-glass window. Six minutes later those windows were swept in spines and splinters across the room, clearing the table in their passage, and were sticking into or cutting deep gashes in the wall and sideboard on the opposite side of the room. Had I been five minutes late that morning, death or loss of sight to myself and my little son would have resulted. I was, as a matter of fact, saying a leisurely good-bye to my wife, when there came a thundering roar which shook the whole house. The day previously we had received a notice that firing would be carried out from the forts. As new-comers, and thinking that some gun existed much closer to the house than I had any idea of, I began to explain that there was no cause for alarm. Before I had finished speaking—an interval of possibly ten seconds—there came a second crash. This time the floor seemed to rise up and the room was filled with dust and soot, though luckily the windows, which were double and facing away from the explosion, stood. My wife cried out that it was a bomb in the garden, and made for the door. My own view was that it was a gas explosion in the kitchen and the whole side of the house must have gone. On reaching the hall I saw that the big double front doors had been burst wide open. I ran towards them, and there, right in front of the house (which faced the citadel), was rising into the air a most wonderful cauliflower-like plume of white smoke, twisting and twirling and changing colour in the brilliant sunlight of a perfect Canadian early winter morning.

I called to my wife, "Those d— Germans must have blown up the citadel. Much damage must have been caused, but you need fear no further danger." Realising that whatever had happened I would be required at the office as soon as possible, I flung on my greatcoat and hurried down the street, leaving my wife to get the shattered house in order as best she could. No trams were running—though I was—but my running days being left rather far behind I soon slowed to a walk and had ample opportunity to note the damage done. The windows of every house had been shattered, and the side walks were a mass of glittering glass. Trees were twisted and splintered, telegraph posts bent and broken. Luckily a tradesman's motor passed, and in the name of the King I called for a lift, which was very willingly given, and in a few minutes I was at the convoy office in Hollis Street. It was even now barely 9.20, and people were hardly recovered from the stupefying effect of the first shock. At the door of the office I met my assistant, Captain Turnbull, R.N.R., who was on the look-out for me, and on our way down to the wharf he explained to me that he believed the explosion to have been caused by a burning ship. At 8.45, H.M.S. Highflyer had reported the *Imo*, Belgian relief ship, and the *Mont Blanc*, a French steamer laden with T.N.T., in collision in the Narrows, and at 9 a.m. a report had come through that the latter was on fire. Captain Turnbull was, I believe, actually receiving a report from the boarding officer over the 'phone at the moment the explosion occurred. On my arrival at the

office I had sent a messenger to Admiral Le Marchant, who was at the Halifax Hotel, a few doors down the street, telling him of my intention to proceed afloat. Admiral Le Marchant was Convoy Admiral, on board the Knight Templar, then in harbour. On arrival at the wharf I found the Convoy tug Maggie under steam. Admiral Le Marchant arrived almost as soon as myself, and we were afloat by 9.30. As he had not hoisted his flag, and would not do so until the convoy was ready for sea, we were of opinion that it was my place to take direction of affairs as Senior Officer of Escorts, from the British naval standpoint, and though availing myself of that officer's advice, I therefore continued to direct matters throughout. The British men-of-war in harbour were H.M.S. Highflyer, Captain Garnett, Changuinola, Captain Wilcox, and the Knight Templar, the last being only an armed merchant vessel (and not a properly commissioned vessel) of somewhat ambiguous status.

Proceeding first alongside the Changuinola, as nearest ship, I ordered the commanding officer to signal Highflyer senior officer afloat that all vessels were to raise steam immediately, and be ready to leave wharves or get under way if necessity arose. Signals to land all available medical and relief parties had already been made by Highflyer, and as the Changuinola's parties were ready, I took them with me in the tug. During the few minutes waiting alongside the ship I was able to observe something of the extent and magnitude of the disaster. The district from Royal Canadian Dockyard to Pier 9, at Richmond, was a complete wreck, and even as we watched fires were springing up in all directions, and increasing with amazing speed. First a puff of white smoke, like a tuft of cotton wool, then a bright spark, and then a raging furnace. One wondered when the flames would stop as they burrowed further and further into the comparatively intact part of the town. Fortunately the day was an extremely fine one, and such wind as there was blowing took the flames away from the better part of the town; but even so the progress was truly alarming, and one wondered if anything could escape. Round the wharves the flames flickered and threatened to take hold on the piles themselves, most of the wharves being timber construction, and in many cases the ships alongside some of which were laden with explosives, were also threatened.

After leaving the Changuinola I landed Admiral Le Marchant in the dockyard to interview the Canadian S.N.O. I also put ashore a surgeon and a stretchèr party, as it was obvious that there was plenty of work for them there. I kept a similar party with me in the tug, as I intended to investigate the destruction which had taken place further up the harbour, and in particular I was anxious to know the result of the explosion as regards the 30 or 40 vessels awaiting convoy and anchored in the Bedford Basin. To even pass the Narrows was an undertaking not without risks—the water, as far as the eye could reach,

was completely covered with wreckage of all sorts and kinds, principally the refuse of destroyed wharves. My little tug, the Maggie, one of those chartered for convoy use, was splendidly handled by her master and owner, Captain Gordon, a Nova Scotia Scotsman, a septuagenarian, and one who had that morning lost a fine vessel and several old friends. He accepted the situation with less seeming perturbation than many men would of half his age. Passing through the Narrows we could see the Imo, an old Cunarder, much shattered, and aground on the Dartmouth side of the harbour.

The steamer Calonne was alongside the dry dock wharf, with a heavy list and upper works demolished. A small tug was also visible (which afterwards proved to be the Hilford, the property of Captain Gordon, mentioned above), which had been thrown on top of the wharf and was lying a complete wreck on a pile of jumbled timber, some 30 ft. above the water. About the centre of Tuft's Cove was the wreck of the fine steamer Curaca, which had been lying at the wharf on the Richmond side, loading mules. She had been carried across either by the explosion or the resulting wave. Her masts and funnel were broken short off, and her stern was bulged inwards like a dented tin can. This ship must have been very close to the Mont Blanc at the time of the explosion.

On entering the Bedford Basin I closed the guardship, and was relieved to discover that the damage to the ships of the convoy had been slight, the guardship herself, the nearest vessel, having sustained only trifling damage.

In view of this reassurance I returned to the focus of the explosion, which was evidently just about the Richmond sidings of the Intercolonial Railway. In passing this point on my return I observed a person making signals to attract our attention, and on closing I found it was a survivor from the Hilford, one of my own vessels. We landed to see what could be done. Around was confusion beyond description. The stacks of timber, the debris of the piers and railway sheds, the ties and lines of the sidings which had been torn up by the wave were inextricably mixed up and piled in heaps, which I can only compare to a box of spillikin on a gigantic scale. Amidst the ruins wandered a few dazed creatures, blood-stained and in rags. They were the remains of the military guard stationed on the pier. Many of the guard were in a dying condition, others had been pinned to the ground by the flying masses of timber. Beneath one of the largest piles I could distinguish the body of my very capable second assistant, Lieut.-Commander T. A. Murray, R.C.N.V.R., who had been making a telephonic report to the convoy office at the time the explosion took place. It was a terrible business getting the dying and badly injured men across such a terrain and down to the boat, but the route shorewards was even more impassable, and Captain Turnbull and the crew of the Maggie accomplished wonders.

I had left my surgeon's party to attend to the dying on the *Calonne*, and as the men now rescued all required immediate medical attendance I took them, on board the *Highflyer*, where I first learnt of the fate of Commander Triggs and his boat's crew. By this time I had fairly satisfied myself both as to the cause of the disaster and its magnitude; at least as far as it had affected those vessels which were in my immediate sphere and the result of the explosion to the resources of the port, which must be of a very far-reaching nature. I felt therefore that, attractive though rescue work might appear, my immediate duty was to try and inform the Admiralty and the main ports along the coast of what had happened.

Of course, all nearer communications had been destroyed, aerials were down, and the *Niobe*, containing the naval intelligence office, had been within the area of worst damage. On reaching that ship I was fortunate enough to find Captain Eldridge, the very capable naval staff officer, at his post, and I drafted out a short cable, as follows:—

Addressed to Admiralty and C.-in-C., Noon, December 6th.

At 9 a.m., as result of collision, the French munition vessel *Mont Blanc* blew up in Narrows. Radius quarter-mile complete wreck, and town badly damaged. Fear loss of life considerable. Fires raging, but getting under control—difficult to exaggerate damage. Ships in basin safe, also armed vessels. *Highflyer* slightly injured. Fear loss of three officers and about 40 men—officers Triggs, Murray, and Ruffles. Hope to sail convoy shortly, but please notify all centres *Halifax* out of action for some time.—Ends.

I left with the assurance that Captain Eldridge would get this message through if possible, and it was, I believe, the first clear statement which actually got through to the outer world. My message was taken into the country by motor car and wired from there.

The fires were still raging fiercely in places. Almost every house in the district most affected was of wood, and heated by a central stove. When therefore whole streets collapsed like card-houses it was only a question of minutes before the stoves broken in the collapse would communicate their fire to the wooden debris. In many cases the inmates, imprisoned by the jammed doors, were burnt alive as if in a trap.

By 12.30 the fires were definitely burning themselves out, though in certain directions, notably around the dry dock and the sugar refinery, they were still raging fiercely.

The sugar refinery was one of the most conspicuous buildings in *Halifax*, a great square block of brick. It had not been in use for some time, and many proposals had been made to use it for barracks, offices, or other purposes. The C.-in-C. had been very anxious that both the Convoy Office and the Naval Control Office should be located in this building, and as I looked at the heap of ruins over which the flames flickered furiously I could not help congratulating myself that the con-

ditions of my work had caused me to go elsewhere. For my staff, being actually at work before 9 a.m., it is probable that not one of them would have survived had our quarters been in that building.

Down by the dry dock the flames were menacing the wharves, but the Calonne, with a dangerous cargo of ammunition, which had been lying at this wharf, had been hauled out into the stream earlier in the morning. This ship was destined to be a source of trouble for many weeks to come. Her smoke-producing apparatus had been smashed, and the nodules of phosphorus scattered broadcast about her decks. Her upper works were in a fearful state, and huge masses of rock weighing several tons had lodged in her superstructure. From the nature of these masses we could only conclude that they had been brought from the bed of the harbour by the explosion.

For a very considerable period fires were constantly breaking out on board her through the ignition of the phosphorus, and then would come the cry from a nerve-tired public that another explosion was about to take place. In vain I tried to explain that the ammunition, of which she had several hundred tons on board, was of quite a different nature to the cargo of the Mont Blanc, and even in the very unlikely event of an explosion taking place no harm could possibly result to the city, since she was anchored at a distance of several miles. The cry went up, "Make all safe by taking her to sea and sinking her." I had indeed some trouble in preventing this absurd waste of a fine ship. I am glad to say, however, that she finally left under her own steam, and is now, I hope, doing her part in restoring the trade of the world.

Even when her cargo was being finally removed with every possible care a small cordite fire did take place, brought about by a cracked cartridge case and an almost imperceptible fragment of phosphorus, but, as I had anticipated, no harm resulted, though it gave the Jonahs a chance to exclaim, "I told you so."

To return, however, to the happenings of the fatal December 6th. On my way to the Niobe I got in touch with the Canadian S.N.O. Captain Pasco, the acting captain superintendent, had been very badly shaken and cut about the head by flying glass and was temporarily incapacitated. Captain Hose, R.C.N., was therefore doing his duty.

The dockyard had been very badly shattered and many houses unroofed. Sheds were torn open from end to end and a large proportion of the personnel damaged. The cadets' college was a wreck and many of the boys cut by the glass. Captain Hose was, therefore, in view of the many details requiring attention in the dockyard, very glad to accept my offer to deal generally with the situation from a naval point of view, such as organisation of patrols and piquets. He also authorised me to speak for the Canadian S.N.O. in any arrangements which might be proposed.

In response to my request he directed that soundings should be taken in the Narrows, as it was by no means certain, in view of displacement of wharves and the possibility of sunken ships, that the channel was clear. It was proved, however, that no obstruction existed.

After leaving the dockyard I met General Benson, the military commandant of the Halifax Garrison, and gave him a *résumé* of the situation from the naval point of view. He asked me to accompany him to a meeting at the town hall, convened by the Lieut.-Governor (McCallum Grant), which I did. I found there all the principal persons responsible for the ordering of public safety and the governing of the town. I there gathered much information as to the extent of the disaster. The losses had been fearful, and this was particularly the case in that part of the town to the north and west of the dockyard, a part largely inhabited by the families of dockyardsmen.

The blast of the explosion seemed to have swept up the hill towards Fairview, the hull of the ship acting in some way to confine its direction. The pause between the first explosion, the ground shock, and the air wave which followed at some seconds interval, according to distance, had proved particularly fatal, since the first impulse had invariably been to look out of the windows, with a result that the crash of glass had either wholly or partially blinded hundreds and prevented them from seeking safety in flight.

The conference was a remarkable experience—Held in the shattered town hall amidst splintered woodwork and floors covered with broken glass. In many cases those present had been at work since the explosion without even an opportunity to ascertain whether their nearest and dearest were in safety. Some showed traces of quick surgical attendance in the shape of plaster and bandages. I was much struck with the sane and business-like way in which the situation was faced. The difficulties were enormous, all telephonic communications were down and the roads blocked, but I left the building with the impression that order was already beginning to arise out of the chaos, and that what could be done would be done.

One remarkably fortunate alleviation of the situation had appeared. The railway authorities reported that although the whole of the railway station sidings and main rail approaches to the town (then in use) had been wrecked, yet there was an alternative in the shape of the line just completed to the new terminals at the south end of the town. It had not been intended to use these for some months, but the line was practicable and could be used forthwith. It was decided to bring the relief trains in by this route, the line branching off at Fairview and following the north-west arm to William's Lake, where it crosses over to the shores of the Halifax harbour. It was thus undamaged, and was as a matter of fact continuously used from now on.

On leaving the town hall I returned to my office, where I found that my office staff had had their share of narrow escapes, several windows having been blown in, though we had escaped with much less than our fair share of damage. My secretary had left his desk only a few seconds before the window close beside it had crashed bodily into the room, and sharp stilettos of plate glass were sticking into the door, walls, and all around where he had been sitting.

I found Vice-Admiral Le Marchant and Captain Garnett, of the *Highflyer*, waiting to see me, and I discussed the situation with them, particularly with reference to the fact that part of the crews of the ships which had collided were now in custody on board *H.M.S. Highflyer*, with a view to ensuring their presence at any inquiry which might take place. We considered that the wishes of the Lieut.-Governor should be consulted in this matter.

When about to leave for this purpose Captain Powers-Symington of *U.S.S. Tacoma*, and Commander Moses, *U.S.S. Von Stuben*, arrived to offer any help in their power and to report the arrival of their ships. They informed me that they had seen the explosion and felt the shock many miles off at sea, and this was the cause of their arrival. I considered, in view of what I had already learnt, that such assistance would be welcome, and I took these officers to headquarters, where they were welcomed and arrangements made that men from the *U.S. vessels* should relieve the British naval piquets during the night.

Captain Hines, *U.S.N.*, liaison officer at this port, had also very promptly placed at the disposal of the naval authorities the *U.S. passenger vessel Old Colony* (proceeding to Europe to be fitted as a mine-layer) for service as a temporary hospital, and she was placed alongside a wharf in the dockyard which fortunately remained intact. I requested the officers commanding the *U.S. ships* that any medical help which their vessels could afford should be sent to the *Old Colony*, where such help was urgently required, persons suffering from the most terrible injuries being received in a constant stream.

It was indeed fortunate that the whole of the daylight hours on the 6th remained fine and enabled first aid to be given in the majority of cases. I find the following closing my official report of the 6th:—  
“ In concluding this summary of the events of the day which came under my notice I would state that no description of mine can adequately picture the devastation which has befallen this city. For miles in all the principal streets every window has been reduced to fragments, whilst in parts miles from the focus of the explosion, houses have collapsed and chimney stacks have fallen. Large fragments of the *Mont Blanc* have been picked up miles from the scene of the explosion ”—her guns and anchor were found some three miles away, and some boat furniture over six miles away at Bedford.

The work of rescue was proceeded with during the night, and every effort was made to get the wounded under shelter, but with thousands of

shattered houses this work was of unspeakable difficulty. Shops, churches, public buildings of all kinds were occupied, but even then half the horrors of that night can only be guessed at. On the morning of the 7th a further complication came to complete the difficulties of the situation—snow—a regular blizzard making all communication still more difficult. As the day wore on the weather became worse and worse, the snow being absolutely blinding and forming deep drifts. My own staff had been since daylight rescuing the body of their comrade, Lieut.-Commander J. A. Murray, which they did under very trying conditions.

In view of the impossibility of seeing more than a few yards I did not go afloat myself, but carried out such general organisation as was possible from my office, which was thronged with persons requesting instructions and those seeking to know the fate of relatives, the greater part of the day.

In view of the number of vessels lying in the port which had been injured, and the great damage which had been done to the repair shops, wharves and railways, it seemed to me that it would be desirable to take steps that a gathering of those representing the principal waterside interests at the port should be convened to decide how far the transport activities of Halifax would be interrupted and what reconstruction measures would be possible. Captain Hose, the C.S.N.O. (acting), who was very busy clearing the wreckage in the dockyard, asked me to take the initiative in the matter, and after consulting with the Lieut.-Governor and the military authorities, who warmly supported the idea, I agreed to preside at such a meeting on the evening of the 8th.

The time was very short and my knowledge of the local conditions and personalities very imperfect. All those who were wanted to attend had moreover to be personally sought out and a communication putting forward the points to be considered delivered into their hands.

In spite of many difficulties, the meeting took place at the Board of Trade rooms, and was even more representative than I had hoped, Sir Robert Borden, the Premier of the Dominion, being present and introducing the subject of the meeting in a sympathetic speech. The meeting went well, and a strong committee was elected which forthwith took the matter of reconstruction in hand, with results which are well known, namely, that Halifax continued to be the chief shipping port until the end of the war.

The blizzard attained its maximum strength during the night of 7th—8th. Thanks to such steps as we had been able to carry out in the way of securing the damaged ships little trouble resulted afloat, though one or two dragged. I was told that it was one of the most severe gales of its nature for some years, and it was therefore particularly unfortunate that it should have followed so close on the top of this unparalleled disaster.

On the morning of the 8th the weather was much improved and I was able to carry out a further inspection of matters afloat and arrange

for the collection of the dead from the various vessels. I was also getting out details of the damage for transmission to the Admiralty. My assistant, Captain Turnbull, also went afloat, compiling a full report of the damage done and steps being taken to make it good as far as possible. Landing at the dockyard I inspected the hospital ship Old Colony, where I found all going satisfactorily and the American doctors doing splendid work.

By this time relief trains with stores, nurses, and doctors were arriving from all parts, Boston in particular having been very prompt in sending aid. The snow was almost waist deep in the dockyard, but I struggled through deep drifts to the dock, where I found the Norwegian steamer Hovland. Her decks were bulged in and funnel over the side, but she was not hopelessly damaged, nor had she suffered by the fire which had burnt itself out all around her. The machine shops were all destroyed.

The dry dock was in the heart of the worst area, and the large sugar refinery close to was merely a pile of bricks, amongst which fragments of bodies could be discerned, the dock labourers having used the building as a vantage ground to view the unusual spectacle of a ship on fire.

After inspecting the dock and deciding that the gate was intact, I returned to my office, getting a lift in a sleigh part of the way. This being the only practical means of transport.

I spent the afternoon interviewing callers, making out reports, answering telegrams innumerable, as inquiries were now coming in from all sides, and preparing agenda for the evening's conference.

Sunday 9th.—During the night the weather again changed, heavy rain set in accompanied by a south-west gale. Such weather is rare, even in Halifax, which is noted for its rapid alternations of temperature. The streets were waist deep with semi-liquid snow, whilst small rivers rushed down many of the streets. If anything was required to add to the discomfort of the unhappy town this was the last straw.

On Tuesday 11th a slow convoy left with Highflyer and 33 vessels. It should have sailed on 7th, but the Highflyer had sustained damage such that she was not ready until the 10th, and then only through the unceasing energy of Captain Garnett and her officers and men. The weather on the 10th was so bad that had the convoy left it would have had to be hove to, and possibly scattered. There was a good deal of difficulty in getting away a few of the vessels, whose masters' nerves had possibly been a little upset by recent happenings, but on the whole the result was creditable to all concerned, and particularly so to Captain Turnbull, R.N.R., my chief assistant.

On the afternoon of the 12th, finding that I could spare an hour, I obtained permission of General Benson (G. O. C.) to inspect the ruined area, as I wished to get a first-hand idea as to the rescue and this work in progress.

I motored along Barrington Street (the main thoroughfare). From the King Edward Hotel (close to the main R.R. station) to Africaville, on the Bedford Basin, every house was wrecked, either by the explosion or the resulting fire. Abreast of the dry dock we were stopped by piquets, and even my uniform and the presence of an officer delegated to show me round did not ensure instant passage, which would indicate that the cordon was fairly effective.

I noticed large parties with maps, systematically investigating the ruined area, and was able to note that many bodies were still being recovered, though the deep snow and the terrible confusion of this area made the work very difficult. Indeed, some bodies were not found until the final departure of the snow in the spring. A pathetic note was struck more than once when we came across piles of children's toys, which had escaped the fire though the owners had probably perished.

Richmond and the wharves, except a portion of Pier 9, has practically ceased to exist, the Mont Blanc having been just off Pier 8 at the time of the explosion. The greatest eruptive force seemed to have passed up the hill, just north of the Wellington Barracks. Passing through Africaville, a town formed of negro shacks, upon the edge of the Bedford Basin, very little injured except glass, being under the shoulder of the hill, we came to Fairview, noting that the ice was already forming some distance out on the Bedford Basin. Fairview Church was badly wrecked, in spite of the interposition of the hill (226 ft.) between it and the explosion in the direct line. Here we passed a large gang of grave diggers and several funeral sledges laden with dozens of coffins on the way to Fairview Cemetery. Nearing the summit of the hill towards the cotton factory, it was interesting to note the destructive down thrust of the explosion, the roofs in many places being crushed in though the side walls were unaffected.

The cotton factory had been gutted, and the paint factory close to completely wrecked, as had been the large new schools near by. This, about a mile from the explosion, represented the ultimate limit of complete destruction in this direction, though buildings on the further side of the area,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles off, were many of them very badly damaged.

We next proceeded to the Wellington Barracks, just on the southern border of the line of complete destruction. These barracks had been well and strongly built, in British government days, of brick, and had stood the blast astonishingly well, but every window had caved in, and the roof was in portions buckled and in parts blown off. The brick was hardly cracked and the windows were being rapidly covered in with cloth and beaver board to make the place habitable for temporary occupation. The married quarters were mostly of wood and a hopeless wreck; they had just escaped inclusion in the fire zone. In spite of the destruction I was informed that there were only seven deaths in the barracks, though the injured were very numerous. Passing along

Gottingen Street, all much shattered, Admiralty House had from its solid construction escaped fairly well and was being used as a hospital. St. Joseph's Church was a complete wreck, with the new organ standing out prominently amongst the ruins.

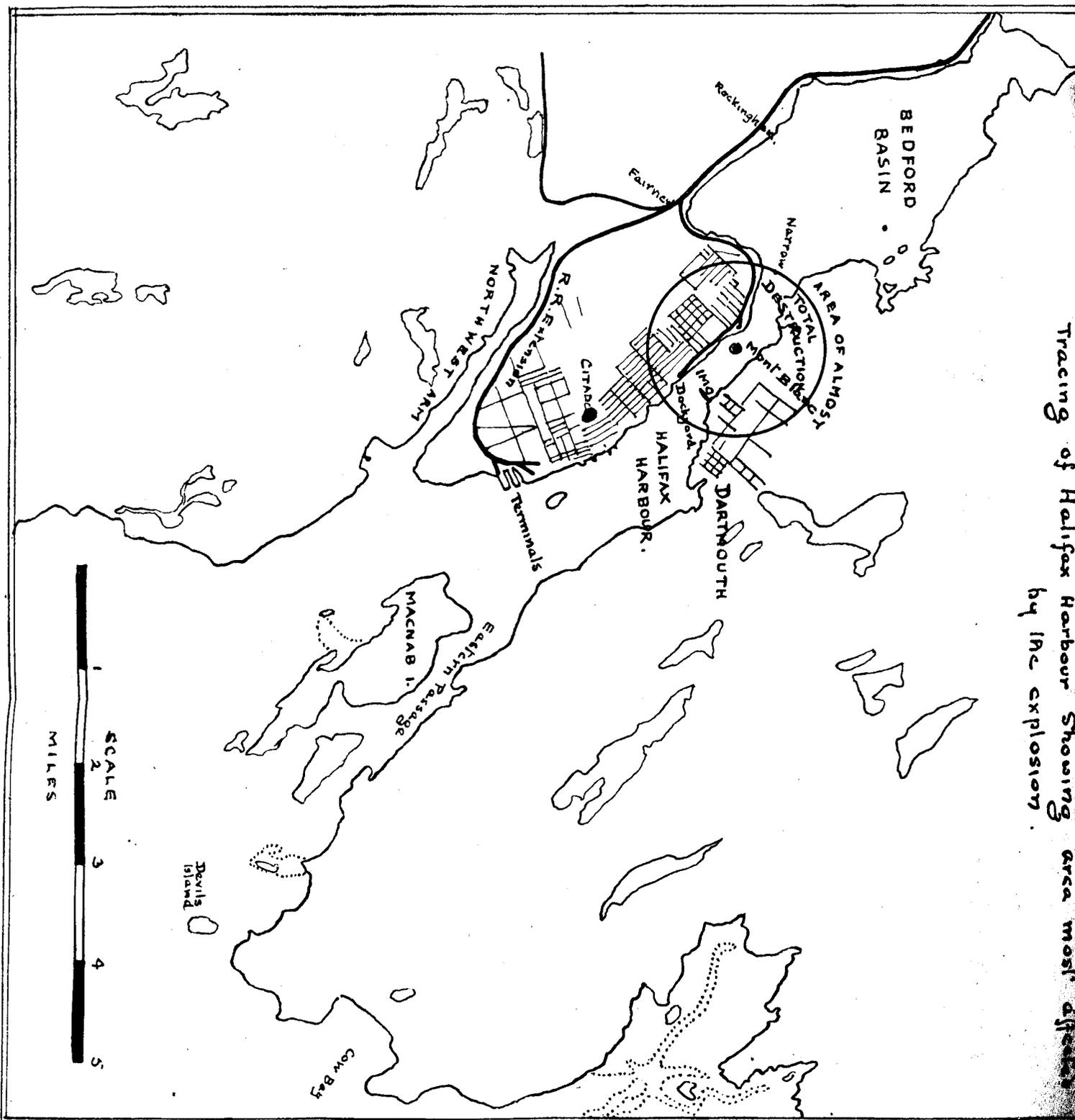
The roof of the Armoury was warped and bent and the windows blown in, but the massive walls fairly intact; the side of the church next door was completely blown in and the interior exposed. From the Armoury we passed north of the citadel, where the old garrison church was a complete wreck. The old military hospital had stood the shock well, but the city market was a mere shell. Passing down the hall to my office in Hollis Street I noticed that the whole of Argyle Street above the esplanade was full of newly-made packing cases; for the moment I did not realise that these were emergency coffins awaiting occupants. The impression I derived from my trip was that everything was being done that circumstances permitted. Various committees were working steadily, churches, halls, theatres, etc., were being prepared for housing the destitute.

From now on things gradually improved, and in a wonderfully short space of time emergency buildings sprung up on all the open spaces, but it will be years before the traces of the disaster cease to be felt.

Finally, it may be interesting to remark that in general the upper windows of houses which remained intact suffered far less than the lower ones—in my own house few were broken on the second floor, about half those on the ground floor, whilst all those in the basement were driven in. Dartmouth was very badly damaged, a heavy blast having passed just to the northward of the main body of the town. From information received it would appear probable that for a few seconds the Narrows were bare to the bottom of the harbour, and it is wonderful that the Highflyer should have escaped as she did, the Niobe alongside the dockyard and the cadets' college, about the same distance, being far more badly shaken. There were, of course, stories innumerable of wondrous happenings. People blown from the summit of tall buildings and landed unhurt on the ground. People fully dressed finding themselves naked and practically unhurt, though dazed, half a mile from the place where the explosion caught them; but as I have in the main confined myself to first-hand evidence, I have preferred that my story should rather be reliable than sensational.

In conclusion, I may mention two small details which give some idea of the strength of the explosion. (1) A bit of the Mont Blanc, 7 lb. in weight, twisted almost into a ball, was found in the garden of my house,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the scene of the explosion; (2) On the deck of the Imo I noticed a bit of the heavy iron casting of the Mont Blanc's stern bracket broken in three separate places, though the section of the cast steel was not less than 7 or 8 inches.

Tracing of Halifax Harbour Showing area most affected by the explosion.



On the 8th I telegraphed a supplementary report to the Admiralty which I find it difficult to improve on even now as a summary:—

Losses are estimated over 1,000 killed, 5,000 wounded, excluding Dartmouth area, though estimates still very vague. Owing to severe blizzard yesterday streets impassable and all work much impeded. The following steamers Mont Blanc sunk. Caraca, Calonne, Imo, Middleham Castle, J. A. McKee, and Picton all badly damaged; several others more or less injured. Crews, many killed. Chartered tug Hilford complete wreck, one survivor. . . . Fires extinguished and situation in hand. Highflyer, killed and missing 9, wounded 13, names cabled. Fear destruction in dockyard very great; am convening a meeting of chief waterside interests at request of Lieut.-Governor and Canadian naval authorities to consider action possible. Halifax complete wreck north of dockyard and much destruction other parts. Dry dock buildings burnt, but dock believed to be intact.

In conclusion a few words as to the experiences of my family may be interesting. Soon after I left a seemingly official report was current that a second explosion even worse than the first might be expected at any moment and everyone was advised to remain in the open. As our garden was fairly large, my household remained out of doors for some time watching the steady stream of people making for the public parks and gardens laden with their most cherished possessions, as if flying from a town threatened with bombardment. After a time, however, they rightly concluded that it was a false alarm and my English servants who had kept their heads throughout, set to work under my wife's direction to make the house habitable. It was a terrible job as everything was covered with a coating of soot whilst the debris of glass splinters and smashed woodwork was indescribable. So well did they work however that long before I returned home late on the night of 6th, the house was comparatively in order, most of the windows boarded up with planks they had found in the cellars, and the staff was hard at work making bandages for use in the hospitals, and accommodation was available and offered for nurses or for those rendered homeless by the explosion.