

Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry Decision, 4 February 1918

Sir:-

Having been directed by the Honourable, the Minister of Marine to hold a formal enquiry into the cause of the explosion on the SS *Mont Blanc* on December 6, 1917, I have to report as follows:-

That as directed I had associated with me as Nautical Assessors, Captain Demers of Ottawa, Dominion Wreck Commissioner, and Captain Walter Hose, R.C.N. of the City of Halifax. I began the enquiry on the 13th day of December A. D. 1917, and having heard all the witnesses that could throw any light on the situation, and having conferred with the Nautical Assessors, I have reached the following conclusions and desire to report as follows:

1. The explosion on the S. S. *Mont Blanc* on December 6 was undoubtedly the result of a collision in the harbour of Halifax between the S. S. *Mont Blanc* and the S. S. *Imo*.
2. Such a collision was caused by violation of the rules of navigation.
3. That the pilot and master of the S. S. *Mont Blanc* were wholly responsible for violating the rules of the road.
4. That Pilot Mackey by reason of his gross negligence should be forthwith dismissed by the Pilotage Authorities and his license cancelled.
5. In view of the gross neglect of the rules of navigation by Pilot Mackey the attention of the Law Officers of the Crown should be called to the evidence taken on this investigation with a view to a criminal prosecution of such pilot.
6. We recommend to the French Authorities such evidence with view to having Captain Lemedec's [sic] license cancelled and such captain dealt with according to the law of his country.
7. That it appearing that the Pilotage Authorities in Halifax have been permitting Pilot Mackey to pilot ships since the investigation commenced and since the collision above referred to, we think the authorities, i.e. Pilotage Authorities, deserving of censure. In our opinion the Authorities should have promptly suspended such pilot.
8. The master and pilot of the *Mont Blanc* are guilty of neglect of the public safety in not taking proper steps to warn the inhabitants of the City of a probable explosion.

9. Commander Wyatt is guilty of neglect in performing his duty as C.X.O. in not taking proper steps to ensure the regulations being carried out and especially in not keeping himself fully acquainted with the movements and intended movements of vessels in the harbour.

10. In dealing with the C.X.O's negligence, in not ensuring the efficient carrying out of traffic regulations by the pilots, we have to report that the evidence is far from satisfactory that he ever took any efficient steps to bring the notice of the Captain Superintendent neglect on the part of the pilots.

11. In view of the allegations of disobedience of the C.X.O's orders by pilots, we do not consider such obedience was the proximate cause of the collision.

12. It would see[m] that the pilots of Halifax attempt to vary well known Rules of the Road and in this connection we think Pilot Renner in charge of an American tramp steamer on the morning of the collision deserving of censure.

13. That the regulations governing the traffic in Halifax Harbour in force since the war were prepared by the Competent Naval Authorities; that such traffic regulations do not specifically deal with the handling of ships laden with explosives, and we have to recommend that such competent authority forthwith take up and make specific regulations dealing with such subject; we realize that whilst the war goes on under present conditions explosives must move, but in view of what has happened we strongly recommend that the subject be dealt with specifically by the proper authorities.

Given under my hand at the City of Halifax this Fourth day of February, A. D. 1918.

Concurred in by the Nautical Assessors
respecting all Nautical matters