Halifax harbour looking south after the explosion. The Imo is aground at Dartmouth, left. H.M.S. High Flyer, (with three funnels) still anchored in stream. The plume of dark smoke to left of the tall chimney is from H.M.C.S. Niobe moored at the Dockyard. In the foreground is the shattered concrete machine shop of the shipyard, and the graving dock containing a large steamer with her superstructure blown away. At lower right is the smokestack and part of boiler of a wrecked locomotive.

H. B. JEFFERSON

DAY OF DISASTER

The Chief Examination Officer predicted the tragedy of the Halifax explosion two years before it happened—but no one paid much attention.

AFTER NINETY-NINE YEARS of world peace and comparative local inactivity, war came to Halifax on August 4, 1914, and to many another Maritime community, as a refreshing breeze bearing on its wings the hope of a glorious resurrection of trade and commerce, and the dawn of a new age of high adventure.

And so it proved. And the end is not yet.

Militia units were mobilized, overseas recruiting begun. The much-derided Tin Pot Navy was overhauled and made ready for sea. One half of it—the old four-funnelled *Niobe*—cruising down to the Virginia Capes, covered herself with glory and her critics with confusion by picking up forty-one prizes—more by far than any other ship in the combined Empire navies.

The younger fry, raised on the romance of war according to Lever, Grant, Marryatt and Henty, hastened to enlist—their main worry that the fighting would be over before they could reach Europe.

While romanticists climbed Citadel Hill or strolled the waterfront for closer looks at famous ships, the more practical and sophisticated—conning orders for "ten thousand dozen eggs" and equivalent quantities of meat and provisions—dusted off traditions of 1812, the Peninsula, the Crimea and the Civil War and prepared to emulate the commissary exploits of old Enos Collins, privateer turned bank president, who ended up the richest man in British North America.

As in the South in 1861, the prevailing atmosphere was one of excited and pleasurable anticipation. Famous names crossed the local stage on their way to immortality: Craddock to Coronel, Sturdee also in search of Von Spee. Came news of the Falkland Islands, and the immediate local danger was over.

By 1916 submarine losses had forced a return to the old convoy system of sailing-ship days. Harbour tonnage had risen to seventeen million annually. There were only fourteen pilots and eight apprentices to handle this Maritime gold rush which resulted in a pilotage bonanza the like of which had not been seen since Mark Twain's days on the Mississippi, when river pilots often took in $1,800 to $2,000 a month.

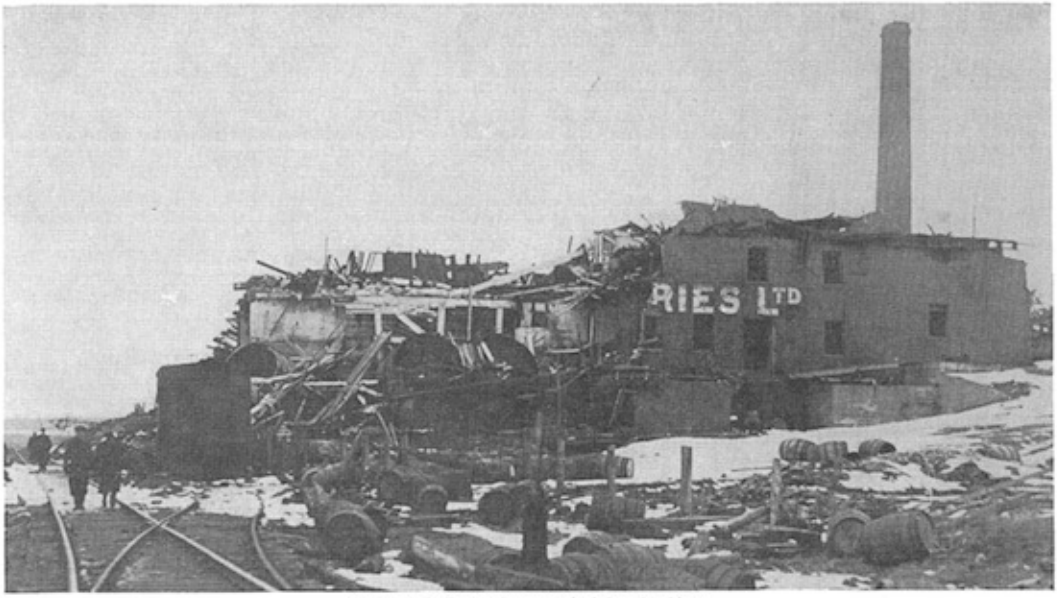
In the nature of things, Halifax was simply an Imperial naval base on Canadian territory. The Royal Canadian Navy was only four years old and nearly all its senior officers were either Royal Navy veterans in the pay of the Dominion, or loaned by the R.N. for the duration. Neutral examination and convoy services were purely British operations. In general the seniors were Old Countrymen and the juniors Canadians.

By fall of 1917 the port had settled down to more or less complacent routine. The city was doing a roaring business. Even the little shopkeepers were making fortunes. An old gentleman who kept a small store near Pier 2 came into the office one night, his pockets bulging with £700 in English one pound notes, which he said represented an hour's trading in tinned butter with sailors from a liner alongside.

War was becoming a permanent way of life. Students no longer talked of law and medicine but debated the relative advantages of commissions in the Infantry, Artillery or Engineers. The Germans showed no sign of any early crackup although the Americans had been in since April. It looked as if the great war boom might go on for years. Christmas was approaching, and the goose hung high.

This was the situation on the evening of December 5, 1917, when the old French Line freighter *Mont Blanc*, loaded down almost to her North Atlantic winter Plimsoll marks, lum-

Mr. Jefferson, who is editor of *Hansard*, Nova Scotia House of Assembly, as a young reporter covered the official enquiry for *The Halifax Herald*.



Dartmouth Breweries, wrecked by the blast

bered up from New York too late to pass the boom. She anchored for the night at the examination ground outside, where Captain Aimé Lemédec produced for the examination officer, Mate Terrence V. Freeman, RCNVR, a manifest showing a full cargo of bulk explosives. Principal item: 2,300 tons of picric acid.

Neither Mate Freeman nor any other naval official knew the details of stowage: that twenty-per-cent-wet picric acid in barrels filled the forward holds; that dry picric in barrels and bags, and guncotton in cases, crammed the forward 'tween decks; that four hundred tons of TNT filled her after hold to capacity. On deck they could see for themselves the 424 steel drums of benzol, a supergasoline by-product of steelmaking.

They did not know that in Gravesend Bay the men loading the *Mont Blanc* had been compelled to wear canvas and rubber shoes to avoid striking a chance spark. Or that her entire hull had been lined with wood for the same reason.

In short, they did not know that this ship was a floating bomb that required only a slight impact to set off. Captain Lemédec's actions next day showed that he alone was fully alive to the terribly sensitive nature of the cargo he was carrying.

On the other side of the harbour boom, four miles away in Bedford Basin, lay the Norwegian steamship *Imo*, formerly the White Star liner *Runic*, a big old-fashioned vessel with four masts. She had arrived two days before from Rotterdam in ballast, bound for New York to pick up another cargo of Belgian relief supplies. She had already passed the examination officers, and had first intended to sail an hour or so before the *Mont Blanc* appeared off the boom.

But she was very short of fuel, and remained at anchor all night, while her agents located fifty tons of suitable coal and put it on board.

If only the Imo had sailed that afternoon!

Or if only the Mont Blanc had been an hour earlier at the boom!

Early on the morning of December 6, the small three-funnelled British cruiser *High Flyer* anchored in mid-stream, abreast the *Niobe*, moored at the Dockyard as flagship for the port admiral and general naval headquarters.

This ship was always an object of special interest to visitors because of her exploits earlier in the war, when she had sunk the German raider *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* off the west coast of Africa, and brought the crew to Nova Scotia where they were then held in the P.O.W. camp at Amherst.

Mont Blanc raised anchor and came through the gate shortly after 8 a.m. and proceeded upstream at nearly full speed, which was not very great. It was because New York doubted her ability to keep up with a convoy that she had been detoured to Halifax for special instructions in case she had to cross the ocean alone.

About the time the *Mont Blanc* was coming through the gate, the *Imo* raised anchor and moved toward the Narrows which connect Bedford Basin with the main harbour. There was low-lying heavy mist in the Narrows so that the beaches could not be seen four hundred feet on either side of the ship, but the hillside landmarks above were plainly visible.

As they entered the Narrows the tug *Stella Maris* with two scows came out of the Shipyard and started across toward Dartmouth. *Imo* blew one blast and the tug turned and hugged the Halifax shore.

Also coming toward them from the harbour they could see a large steamship just east of the *High Flyer*. As they neared one another there was still plenty of room to pass if the *Imo* continued down the Halifax side and the *Mont Blanc* up the Dartmouth shore.

But at this point began a series of steam-whistle signals the sequence and meaning of which take up hundreds of pages of the official record with arguments not readily understood by the layman even with the aid of charts and models, dealing as they do with rules of the road in narrow places, and the probable movements of vessels both light and loaded under various wind, tide, propeller and helm conditions.

Put in its baldest and simplest terms, the nautical assessors who advised the court, decided that for reasons never satisfactorily explained, the *Mont Blanc* suddenly turned toward Halifax across *Imo's* bow, or as suddenly as a heavily laden ship can do.

Pilot and officers of the *Imo* seemed to be prepared for such an emergency.

They already had their engines going full astern and they swung the ship's bow farther toward Halifax. Their manoeuvre nearly succeeded.

Experienced marine observers testified that the *Imo* was almost stopped when her bow touched *Mont Blanc's* starboard side abreast No. 1 hatch.

If only Imo had had twenty-five feet more clearance!

Or if only Mont Blanc had backed her engines vigorously!

It was between 8.40 and 8.45 when a passing naval dispatch boat stopped to observe the damage, and Coxwain George Abott, RCNVR, reported that the impact merely broke the steel plate skin of *Mont Blanc*, making a long, wedge-shaped cut from waterline to main deck. Through this hole Mr. Abott could see the barrels of picric, undisturbed, neatly ranged in tiers.

As the *Imo* backed away he could also see something else—*a flame about a foot high* that had instantly appeared in the bottom of the gash right at *Mont Blanc's* waterline. Thick black smoke soon began to rise from her deck.

On the bridge, Captain Lemédec gave urgent orders to abandon ship. Two boats were instantly lowered and filled. The chief engineer was slow and Lemédec started below to get him. The captain's last order was to put the helm amidships.

The slight shove from *Imo* had deflected *Mont Blanc's* course so that she was edging south. But for the midships order she might have stranded much farther down the harbour, nearer the centre of population, with heavier loss of life and property. As it was, her momentum was now slowly carrying her toward Pier 6 instead of Pier 9.

Mont Blanc headed slowly in until her bow grated on shore just south of Pier 6. A marine observer upstream said she moved exactly as if being placed alongside the pier by a skilled pilot.

Her crew meanwhile rowed frantically toward Dartmouth, landed, formed up by divisions for a quick roll call, and took shelter in the woods. With them was Pilot Francis Mackey.

Up in the Narrows, Captain Horatio Brannen in *Stella Maris*, a French gunboat converted as a salvage tug, anchored his scows and steamed back to offer aid. He rigged fire hoses and ran into the narrow space between *Mont Blanc* and Pier 6. Heat proved intolerable and they backed out—just in time. A changing tide swung *Mont Blanc* against Pier 6 and set the sheds on fire. The bow remained aground.

While *Stella Maris* was still alongside, a naval steam pinnace arrived, and her sailors climbed on board *Mont Blanc* and tried to rig hoses. The captain of *High Flyer* boarded *Stella Maris* from a rowboat and asked Capt. Brannen to "put a line on her" and tow her out into the stream.

Brannen thought the five-inch line not strong enough and ordered his son, Mate Walter Brannen to get a ten-inch hawser from the hold. Walter stood at the open hatch directing the men.

Pilot Hayes in the *Imo* stopped trying to turn around to go back to the Basin and started down harbour to get more elbow room.

☆ ☆ ☆

In the Dockyard, Captain Fred C. C. Pasco, RN, a fine, old, bearded British seadog of forty years experience, heard the commotion from the Captain's House where he was residing temporarily while relieving Capt. E. H. Martin, regular commandant.

Pasco dashed to the phone but it was only 8.45 and most Dockyard officials were still *en route* from homes to offices. He left Capt. Martin's servant to try to "raise" someone, and himself went upstairs for a better look, but could see nothing because of smoke. The Port Control Officer came on the line and Pasco ordered him to get the *W. H. Lee*, *Gopher*, *Musquash* out—anything with pumps.

Someone phoned the Halifax fire department and the new motor engine *Patricia* was dispatched to Pier 9. Hundreds of citizens boarded street cars or walked up to see what was causing the smoke.

Bill Lovett, chief clerk at the Canadian Government Railways freight office, telephoned Harry Dustan, CGR terminal agent at North Street, that he "feared an explosion".

Dustan ran out and grabbed a street car and got as far as the North Gate of the Dockyard.

Although the touchy nature of the cargo was not known even to naval people, many civilians seem suddenly to have had an intuition of extreme danger.

Vincent Coleman, operator at Richmond, wired Truro:

"*A munitions ship is on fire and is heading for Pier 8. Good-bye.*"

Hayes just had the *Imo* straightened out . . . The *Patricia* had just arrived at the lane leading down to the wharf . . . Walter Brannen was still leaning over the hatch on *Stella Maris* . . . Capt. Pasco had just finished telephoning and had walked to the centre of his living room . . . when *Mont Blanc* exploded.

There was no sharp bang. Rather a muffled w-h-o-o-m!

Survivors who were near by cannot recall hearing *anything*. Those farther down town recall it as a rumbling roar.

A giant mushroom cloud, so familiar now in connection with atomic blasts, rose miles in the air over the Narrows.

The French ship simply vanished into thin air.

Days later her 95 mm. stern gun was found in Albro Lake, back of Dartmouth, and a piece of her anchor stock came down in Spryfield, two miles in the other direction behind Halifax. No other traces ever were found except a few pieces of steel plate that penetrated the *Imo's* hull and lodged there.

The rest of her disintegrated in hot shrapnel.

The captain of the *High Flyer* and his two boats' crews never were seen again.

The North End district known as Richmond was blasted off the map and its inhabitants buried under the ruins.

The North End of Dartmouth, not so thickly populated, suffered a similar fate. Even the *Mont Blanc's* crew sheltering in the woods did not escape. Several were injured and one man died.

The massive Sugar Refinery was turned into a heap of rubble. Water poured on it later from fire hoses froze into a solid mass from which corpses were still being taken the following summer.

Churches, schools, foundries, factories, a brewery, private homes disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. Hot furnaces and upset stoves ignited the debris and in a few minutes large areas were burning fiercely.

Hundreds of the curious who had come to gaze were mowed down by blast and shrapnel. Citizens half a mile from the scene were buried under wreckage of collapsing buildings.

Four hundred and fifty feet upstream the new British steamship *Caracas*, moored at Pier 8, lost forty-nine of her crew who had gathered at the stern to watch the fire. She tore away from the wharf and sank in the stream.

Stella Maris was wrecked and driven ashore. So was *Imo* which lost Captain Haakon From, Pilot William Hayes and four other officers. Boats from the *High Flyer* rescued the badly injured survivors.

North Street station's forty-five-year-old lofty ironwork and glass roof collapsed on standing trains, killing sixty in the trainshed. Vincent Coleman's message proved prophetic: his charred body was found at his post in the telegraph office. Switching and track crews in the yards were wiped out. The CGR had sixty-six killed—worst disaster in the history of the government road.

The looming bulk of Citadel Hill deflected the worst of the blast from the old city, but all over town people were killed, mangled or blinded by flying glass. Light, heat, power, telegraph and telephone lines were instantly out of business.

Freak escapes were legion:

Walter Brennan on the open deck of *Stella Maris* less then six hundred feet from *Mont Blanc*, was thrown down into the hold on top of the cable, sustained only a punctured ear drum. Nineteen of twenty-four others on board were instantly killed.

The wooden drifter *CD73*, Mate Herbert Whitehead, RCNVR, was hovering only three hundred feet from the Frenchman. The drifter was riddled and the crew knocked out temporarily but no serious casualties resulted.

John T. Gammon, a *Niobe* seaman, was in the Dockyard supervising submarine construction of a pier for a new heavy crane. One diver already had gone down and a second was standing on the ladder nearly submerged when the TNT went off. Gammon was knocked down but not out, commandeered a passing seaman to man the air pump, went down the hole and succeeded in bringing up both divers uninjured.

On the *Caracas*, Seaman Edward MacCrossan, chilled, tried to get a chum to go below for a smoke.

"No," said his pal, "I think I'll watch the fire a while."

MacCrossan went down, rolled a cigarette, was just raising it to his lips to seal it when the blast came. He was one of only eight survivors out of fifty-five on board.

Charles John Mayers, third mate of the *Middleham Castle*, lying in the Shipyard, walked down to within one hundred yards of the fire, heard the preliminary explosions and ran back toward his ship, had almost made it when overtaken by blast.

Mayers had the sensation of rising in the air, passing and being passed by flying objects. Then he blacked out. When he came to he was lying half a mile away near the top of Fort Needham Hill with only his boots on. (One of the features of this explosion was its tendency to strip people of their clothing.) He saw a badly injured woman giving birth to a child in the field nearby.

Harry Dustan at the North Gate had escaped injury.

From force of railroad habit, he looked at his watch.

It was just 9.05 a.m.

For thousands the world had turned upside down in a split second. To this day no one knows with any degree of certainty how many lost their lives.

Some people and families simply disappeared without trace.

Many bodies were carried off by a tidal wave that followed immediately upon the explosion and was reported twenty-four hours later by ships far at sea.

A citizen who was assigned to keep some track of it at the time, estimates that fully 3,000 persons in all died by blast, fire or cold.

But the Halifax Relief Commission, which has the only organized statistics (completely accurate as far as they go) says that total listed fatalities (killed and died of wounds) number 1,635.

Thus in one instant perished twenty per cent more Halifax people than were killed, died of wounds or disease during the whole Kaiser War: 1,360.

Two thousand wounded required hospital treatment; four thousand more were treated at home.

Sixteen hundred buildings were totally destroyed, twelve thousand more or less badly damaged within an area of sixteen miles.

Property damage was placed at $35,000,000.

The original list of 1,028 pensioners has dwindled now to 175 and there are a hundred others who receive occasional treatment, usually for old eye injuries.

Pete Lawson, news editor of the *Halifax Herald*, veteran of disasters in the United States and Canada, made his way out the railroad to the nearest undamaged telegraph office and sent the first real news.

The response was instantaneous. Truro had a relief train moving east with doctors and nurses within an hour. Sydney, Moncton, Saint John followed fast. Massachusetts State Guard rushed a complete military hospital by rail. Boston sent the steamship *Calvin Austin* with supplies including tons of window glass, the most urgently needed commodity. Eventually from all parts of the world came more than $30,000,000 assistance.

But while this help was on the way, a blizzard came down and put out the fires but froze many of those trapped in wreckage.

Firemen, military and naval garrisons spear-headed the work of rescue, assisted by thousands of volunteers. Emergency shelter, food and clothing stations were set up. Tents, rough huts were rushed up, all sound buildings commandeered. Ships in the harbour landed rescue crews, turned themselves into floating hospitals.

Cause of the disaster was still unknown to most. Even Capt. Pasco at first thought the *High Flyer's* magazine must have blown up. He received severe head wounds which partially blinded him, and after struggling for several hours, handed over command to Capt. Walter Hose.

Most common impression of the moment was a German air or naval raid. This was evidently the idea of a small group of German nationals or sympathizers who at the first heavy rumble ran out of the house shouting:

"They're here! They're here! Hooray! Hooray!"

Passing MP's took note of the untimely celebration, lugged them off to P.O.W. camp at the Citadel.

Over the hill from Richmond at Willow Park roundhouse a local metal merchant's men had for months been breaking up sixty old locomotives, sometimes using dynamite on the larger parts. A machinist said that when the windows came crashing in "We thought at first that John Simon must have put in too big a charge."

The *Herald* dug up an old hand operated job press and put out small news sheets giving casualty lists and other data to meet the urgent demand for information.

Families were separated and reunited under unique circumstances that would shame the imagination of the best fiction writers.

An old-fashioned, horse-drawn hack drew up in front of the driver's residence. When he made no attempt to get down from the box, his family rushed out to find him stone dead, still erect and clutching the reins.

While the city was still burning, word went round that the Dockyard magazine was on fire (as indeed it was) and would cause even greater havoc than the first blast. One young mother, finding a bakery team abandoned outside her house, hastily bundled up the neighbourhood infants, placed them on the warm bread and drove them five miles to safety at Herring Cove.

A messenger boy on Gottingen Street a mile from the *Mont Blanc* was knocked out by what seemed like a heavy blow on the back. When he came to he was in darkness, but could catch a gleam of light away above him. Working his way between beams and boards he reached the street to find that a store had fallen out on him.

Many dead were mistakenly identified: a sergeant-major of the Royal School of Infantry startled morgue keepers by walking in and saying: "Please may I have a look at my body?"

The older part of the city and the South End were intact except for windows, and in a few days—such are the exigencies of war—business was proceeding as usual. In fact so far as the port was concerned, it never stopped for a moment.

Good board and room could be had for $7 to $10 a week. Many people whose circumstances permitted, moved families to provincial towns for the duration or until new houses should be ready.

Fires were still burning when Premier Sir Robert Borden, who also represented Halifax, arrived from Prince Edward Island. He had already ordered a million dollars devoted to immediate relief. He now decreed the reconstruction of the city, which was duly carried out by Col. Bob Low and others, under a federal commission.

Many thousands of Haligonians who were children or youths at school in 1917 still retain vivid memories of the great explosion. But there are also many who were full grown then and participated importantly in the event, such as George Fenton, who put Pilot William Hayes on board the *Imo* in the Basin from his tug that bright morning.

Or William Wells, seventy-six, who was driver and sole survivor of the *Patricia*. Or Roy Hudson, waterboy of the *Stella Maris*, who was picked up with both feet crushed, floating on a cabin door off the ferry wharf, and has lived to wear out eighteen pairs of artificial limbs.

Still more curious is the story of Frank Gunn, who on the fortieth anniversary found himself again in Victoria General Hospital where he had been an explosion patient in 1917—this time with a fractured skull and wrists sustained in a fall from a scaffold on which he was working. He is the sole survivor of the large Hillis Foundry staff.

One of the 1917 student survivors is Dr. Thomas Raddall, the eminent novelist, whose Chebucto school served as the principal morgue. His description of the disaster in his notable book *Halifax, Warden of the North*, is probably the most complete, accurate and readable account of it ever written.

Russell Urquhart, recently elected mayor of Sydney, as a boy was severely injured in the explosion at Dartmouth, where he was living at the time.

The Halifax Explosion was one of the world's great, spectacular disasters. Until Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it used to be said that the *Mount Blanc* blast was the loudest sound ever heard on earth except the eruption of Krakatoa in 1888.

This, however, was all in the future as Haligonians dug themselves out from under the debris of their city on December 7, 1917, and tried to find out what had hit them—and *why*.

"GXP" gossiped the press operators over their leased wires, meaning "Great excitement prevailed."

The air was full of all sorts of rumours and reports.

Enemy agents. Secret arrests. New imminent explosions. The *Imo* had been deliberately steered into the *Mont Blanc* to wreck the convoy port. No, the *Mont Blanc* was the villain and had turned across the *Imo's* bow knowing an explosion must result. Capt. Lemédec's precipitate retreat to Dartmouth looked to many like a well considered performance. *Mont Blanc's* crew included Germans and Austrians. Mysterious figures had been seen leaping from her deck to the pier just before the blast. *Imo's* helmsman had been arrested as a saboteur. Frank Mackey was still piloting and had just come within an ace of ramming another munitions ship.

This last drew a prompt blast from the pilot who said: "No, sir. I consider it the greatest piece of treachery that was ever perpetrated."

Official secrecy and reluctance to give information only stimulated the flow of accusation and innuendo. Such denials as were made would hardly be in type before some new turn of events would confirm or partly confirm the original story. An aroused and uneasy public flooded newspaper offices with startling material, much of which proved to be substantially correct.

There was sharp criticism of the naval command for allowing *Mont Blanc* in harbour at all. That important officers were more concerned with social activities than the safety of the port. In vain official spokesmen pointed out that if even a fraction of the proposed remedies were adopted, shipping could not move at all and convoys would come to a standstill.

Each ship charged the other was exceeding the harbour speed limit of five knots.

It was in this atmosphere of mingled hysteria, suspicion and mutual hostility that Justice Arthur Drysdale of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court opened the official enquiry December 13, 1917, with Capt. Walter Hose, RCN, and Capt. L. A. Demers, Dominion Wreck Commissioner, assisting as nautical assessors.

No small part of the court's time was taken up investigating sensational new incidents that cropped up almost daily.

It was not until January 21 that John Johansen, helmsman of the *Imo*, took the stand. He had indeed been held as a suspect by the military and only after much effort had been rescued by the ship's solicitors from what one of them described as a "dungeon" where he had a soldier armed with a bayonet standing constantly at his head.

Army intelligence now said it had been a case of mistaken identity and that Johansen was a former U.S. navy man. Since receiving proper treatment for an injured leg and eye, his "sullen and morose" attitude had changed, and he now gave what seemed to be a straightforward account of what transpired up to the explosion.

He said frankly he had been engrossed in steering and had not paid much attention to the routine moves of pilot and officers which now loomed so large and vital at the hearing.

Capt. Pasco, his wounded head still partly covered with surgical plaster, was frank, positive and outspoken.

Should an explosives ship carry a red flag?

"It would be *suicidal*—giving information to enemy agents."

Had the possibility of such danger ever occurred to him?

"It certainly did not occur to me that a ship would be coming up the harbour *like a piece of fireworks, ready to be exploded.*"

Would such a cargo be loaded on a British ship?

"I am surprised *any* ship would allow it to be loaded; *I am surprised that the people in the ship did not leave in a body.*"

Sparks from the impact of the ships probably set off the benzol, he said, adding: "That is only guesswork."

To another questioner: An ordinary collision might upset the galley stove, start a fire in galley rubbish.

(Over the years this answer has been twisted into the legend that it *was* the galley fire that ignited the benzol.)

Then, in a casual answer, he confirmed one of the most sensational of the current reports:

"As a matter of fact, I believe in this case Commander Wyatt (chief examination officer in charge of ship movements) *did not give permission for the Imo to leave.*"

Commander Frederick Evans Wyatt, the chief examination officer, married to a Halifax girl, confirmed that *Imo* left the Basin without permission.

"Have you had any other instances of a ship going out without permission?"

"I had one happen *only two days ago.*"

Court and press sat up in amazement.

"The pilots have not been in the habit of carrying out my instructions. *Ships have had to be shot at and stopped.*"

"Were the pilots punished?"

"There has never seemed to be any way of punishing pilots for violations."

There was no direct phone connection between the guard ship in the Basin and the gate boats and on a former occasion the S.S. *Ubier* had got clean away because Wyatt did not see her until she was outside, and she could not be fired at *for fear of hitting other ships.*

Then came the most amazing revelation of all:

Wyatt put in letters to show that he had repeatedly protested through the port commander that pilots were not promptly reporting ship movements.

J. W. Creighton, Commission secretary, said he placed the letters on the bulletin board where pilots would see them, and had personally for a time telephoned lists (furnished by the pilots) to the chief examination office.

But he was overloaded with Commission fiscal work, and delegated this duty to his young clerk.

"*You entrusted it to a fourteen-year-old boy?*"

Naval witnesses said that orders had been issued that only one ship at a time was to use the Narrows. No meeting or passing. While Wyatt was speaking, reports came in that a tanker and munitions ship had crossed in the Narrows the afternoon before and "narrowly escaped" collision.

It was true except that there had been no near collision, Wyatt's assistant said. Explosives ship *Galileo* had lagged behind a convoy, the inward gate had been opened too soon, and she met the tanker *Appallachee* in the Narrows.

Then the court called the pilotage clerk, who was now said to be sixteen instead of fourteen and asked him to explain:

"You thought they were not taking the names down and were laughing at you at the other end of the phone?"

"Yes, sir, the man I was speaking to *often laughed* on the phone—*I thought it was laughing at me.*" So the ships went unreported for months before December 6.

If only the clerk had not been so sensitive!

If only the man at CXO had not been so mirthful!

The Drysdale Board found the *Mont Blanc* solely to blame, her captain and pilot guilty of "gross negligence" in violating navigation rules (which it said was the cause of collision) and in not warning the inhabitants of imminent explosion. It recommended Crown action in the case of the pilot.

The Board censured the Halifax Pilotage Commission for not suspending Mackey pending investigation, and other pilots for varying the rules of the road locally. It censured the CXO for not keeping better track of ships, and for not more strenuously bringing alleged pilotage derelictions to the attention of the port commander. It recommended new regulations governing movement of explosives ships in port.

In Exchequer Court, where *Imo* and *Mont Blanc* sued one another for $2,000,000, and an additional witness was heard, Judge Drysdale said bluntly he did not believe this man knew what he was talking about. His Lordship further declared that if, as Lemédec and Mackey claimed, the collision took place on the Dartmouth side of the channel, then *Mont Blanc's* story was "an impossibility". If it took place in mid-channel the story was still "absurd".

On appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, Chief Justice Sir Louis Davies and Justice Idington found *Mont Blanc* solely to blame. Justices Brodeur and Mignault found *Imo* solely to blame. Justice Anglin found both ships negligent. Brodeur and Mignault then shifted to Anglin's view and the verdict stood:

Both ships negligent.

A new Royal Commission investigated and re-organized the Halifax Pilotage Commission. Pilot Mackey later sought and won reinstatement.

In his last appearance on the stand, Commander Wyatt probably epitomized the whole affair when asked to explain three lines of a letter he had written September 15, 1915—*more than two full years before the disaster*—in which he had informed the then port commander that he would "not be responsible" for what might happen.

What had he meant?

"*For months and months I saw an accident or collision was coming, and I could see that there was somebody going to be made the goat for this, and I did not want to be made the goat. You can call it intuition or what you like, but that was my idea.*"