



**City's Saviours:  
The Military Response to the Halifax Explosion**

By John Boileau

*(Editor's note: the brackets indicate the slide accompanying the text.)*

(Introduction) Good afternoon. Thanks for coming. I'm always happy to speak to people such as yourselves with an interest in our history. Today the subject of my talk is about the army and navy response to the Halifax explosion: crucial aid and assistance that, for some reason, has never been properly or publicly recognized.

(Ships) At 9:04:35 on the cold, clear morning of December 6, 1917, the reality of the First World War came crashing down on Halifax. After a series of navigation errors, at about 8:45 the Norwegian freighter *Imo* (left) sliced into the bow of the French ship *Mont-Blanc* (right), which was laden with a volatile cargo of more than 2600 tonnes of munitions. The collision caused a fire and 20 minutes later, a huge explosion, which literally shredded *Mont-Blanc* and blew *Imo* onto the Dartmouth shore.

(Scene) It was the largest man-made, non-nuclear explosion the world had seen up to that time. The death, injury and sheer devastation that descended upon Halifax equalled the worst of the carnage the First World War inflicted on the battlefields of Europe.

(City) Halifax, with a population of about 57,000, was the largest city in Atlantic Canada. Across the harbour the town of Dartmouth had grown to more than 7,000. When the military population is included, there were some 70,000 civilians, soldiers and sailors in the area.

(Summary) A summary of the death, injury, destruction and damage is shown here. Official death lists record 1,946 names, but many believe this could be as high as 2,500, due to unregistered wartime workers and other outsiders in city. To put this into perspective, a similar explosion today at the same spot would kill 8,600 and injure 38,600. More than 1,600 houses and other buildings were either totally destroyed or severely damaged, with another 5,000 damaged to a lesser degree. Some 25,000 citizens were suddenly homeless or without adequate shelter. Today, that number would be more than 107,000. In all, there was \$35 millions in property damage; about \$550 millions in today's dollars.

(Army) There were about 5,000 soldiers in Halifax; 3,300 stationed here as garrison troops and 1,700 in transit, either returning from Europe or waiting to go overseas. The garrison consisted of 1st Regiment Canadian Garrison Artillery (RCGA), the PEI Heavy Brigade and 10th Siege Battery depot. There were four companies of Royal Canadian Engineers: the 1st, 4th & 10th Companies plus an administrative unit. Three infantry battalions were also part of the garrison. Most of the soldiers of the Halifax Rifles and the Princess Louise Fusiliers had not been allowed to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) when the war started, but were detailed for local protection duties. A third battalion, known as the Composite Battalion, was formed to replace the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) when it deployed to Bermuda in 1914, and then to the western front. Various maritime militia units provided a total of eight companies,

which created an 800-man composite battalion. There were also a number of support and other miscellaneous units.

There were also several hundred soldiers in transit from 16 non-garrison units. Among those units waiting departure for overseas to join the CEF were 5th Canadian Forestry Battalion, 26th Reserve Infantry Battalion, four artillery drafts, a railway construction draft and elements of the RCR and RCGA. There were also some 320 men training to join the British Expeditionary Force, mostly British ex-patriots living in the United States.

The role of the garrison units was to protect Fortress Halifax by manning and guarding the inner and outer harbour forts as shown on the slide, and to provide guards at various vital points throughout the city. I'm not going to dwell on the harbour defences. I know most of you are aware of them and many have visited some of them. Needless to say, due to Halifax's location, its valuable facilities and the German threat, harbour defences were activated during the war. These forts and batteries were manned and armed with guns - usually 12-pounder (equals 3-inch), 4.7-inch, 6-inch or 9.2-inch. Most were breech loading and many were quick firing. Additionally, some batteries were equipped with powerful searchlights for night use, and two submarine nets stretched across the harbour: an outer one from the northern tip of McNabs Island to about where Black Rock Beach is in Point Pleasant Park, and another one from the Dartmouth side to Georges Island, and then from the island to the mainland. Except for Fort Clarence, now buried under the former Esso oil refinery, all still exist in various states of repair - or disrepair - although I'm not sure how much longer Point Pleasant battery will last as it continues to crumble away.

With respect to the landward defences listed at the bottom of the slide (Dugout), a defensive perimeter had been established around Halifax to protect the city and harbour from ground attack, constructed by the Halifax Rifles and the Princess Louise Fusiliers. It consisted of a series of inner camps and outer field works sited on or near major roads leading into Halifax from east and west. These field works encompassed trenches, barbed wire, log blockhouses and dugouts at various locations.

(Navy) By December 1917, the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in Halifax consisted of His Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) *Niobe*, tied up alongside in the dockyard as a depot ship, plus a fleet of small ships: 10 minesweepers moored in the North West Arm - 7 converted herring trawlers and 3 ocean-going tugs, the latter manned by civilians under charter; other tugs armed with 6-pdr guns to protect the anti-submarine nets and act as gate vessels; HMCS *Grilse*, a civilian yacht converted to a euphemistically-named torpedo boat destroyer; 13 auxiliary patrol vessels of various types, largely ships from other government departments and former civilian yachts; 3 newly-built trawlers and 38 wooden drifters; two submarines & their tender, HMCS *Shearwater*, recent arrivals from the west coast.

(Medical) Military medical facilities consisted of the 400-bed garrison hospital on Cogswell Street, the recently-opened but not yet completed Camp Hill Convalescent Hospital with 280 beds, the casualty clearing station at Pier 2, designed to receive wounded soldiers from overseas and prepare them for their journey westward, as well as inspect troops departing for overseas, and a quarantine hospital at Rockhead in the northern part of the city. Additionally, the navy had established a hospital in Admiralty House, with a capacity for 50 patients. Some 600 Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC) doctors, nursing sisters & medical orderlies were stationed in Halifax, including those serving at the CAMC training depot, along with the navy's three surgeons, two nurses & 10 attendants at Admiralty House.

(Stella Maris) Once the fire broke out on *Mont-Blanc*, crews from three of the several ships in Halifax harbour that day played a major part in attempting to assist with the situation aboard *Mont-Blanc*. Despite their valiant attempts, the men aboard the RCN-contracted tug *Stella Maris*, the whaler from the cruiser HMS *Highflyer* and the steam pinnace from HMCS *Niobe*, could do nothing - and suffered dearly for their courage.

*Stella Maris* was near the scene of the collision when it occurred and was the first to try fight the fire and then pull the burning *Mont-Blanc* away from Pier 6, where she had grounded bow first. HMCS *Niobe*, about 640 metres away from Pier 6, was the first ship to give the alarm after the collision. *Niobe's* steam pinnace with six volunteers were sent to try to help the stricken vessel. *Highflyer*, anchored in mid-stream, sent its whaler with two officers and five sailors.

(Pier 6) By the time the whaler got near *Mont-Blanc*, now engulfed in 30 metre high flames, the ship had grounded onto the harbour bottom on south side of Pier 6 as shown in this 1898 photo. The schooner is tied up at almost the same spot *Mont-Blanc* came to rest in 1917. Only the forward part of the vessel touched the pier. All attempts to fight the fire or move *Mont-Blanc* proved hopeless.

While this action took place in the harbour, on land others did their part to deal with the fire. Minutes after the fire started on *Mont-Blanc*, Captain Fred Pasco, temporary Captain Superintendent of the Dockyard, was informed of the blaze. He ordered the tugs *W.H. Lee*, *Gopher*, *Musquash* and any other available ones with pumps to the burning vessel as quickly as possible.

In his Barrington Street grocery store across the road from Pier 6, Constant Upham watched the spectacle of the burning ship - and now the burning pier - unfold before his eyes. He called several nearby fire halls from his telephone. At the same time - shortly before 9 o'clock - someone else rang the bell from nearby box 83 and the alarm was transmitted across the city. Firemen sprang into action at four stations: West, Brunswick and Gottingen Streets and Quinpool Road.

(Patricia) Horse-drawn vehicles rushed toward the fire, as well as a 1912 American LaFrance pumper truck - nick-named Patricia by the firemen. Patricia was Halifax's and the country's first motorized piece of equipment. Fire Chief Ed Condon and his deputy, William Brunt, set off in the official car behind Patricia. The motorized pumper arrived at the pier first, its wooden pilings and sheds now in flames from the fire raging on *Mont-Blanc*. Firemen rolled out a hose and attached it to a nearby hydrant. Once Condon pulled up behind them, he ordered box 83 rung again: a general alarm for all Halifax's fire stations.

(Cloud) At 9:04:35, *Mont-Blanc* blew up. The explosion tore through the ship and her cargo at speeds of approximately 7,600 metres per second, created temperatures in excess of 3,000 degrees Centigrade and vaporized the water surrounding the ship. The vessel simply disappeared. A massive, whitish-grey, billowing cloud shot more than 3,600 metres into the skies, dwarfing the smoke caused by the fire. The explosion sent waves radiating outwards through earth, air and water from the spot where *Mont-Blanc* had been a millisecond earlier.

The first victims were those closest to the burning vessel: crews of *Stella Maris*, *Highflyer* and *Niobe*, as well as the firemen in Patricia and Chief Condon's car, all of whom had come to *Mont-Blanc's* immediate aid.

(*Stella Maris* wrecked) When *Mont-Blanc* exploded, aboard the tug *Stella Maris* (shown wrecked here), the captain and 18 of his 24-man crew were killed instantly; two of the injured died a few days later.

On *Highflyer's* whaler, only an able seaman survived, although he nearly drowned before struggling ashore through icy water.

*Niobe's* steam pinnace was about 275 metres away and the force of the explosion blew it and its crew to pieces. Many city residents blamed the fledgling RCN for the Halifax explosion, believing it failed to adequately control shipping in the harbour.

(Medal) Yet, at the individual level, several sailors - Canadian and British - performed acts of heroism immediately before and after the devastating explosion. For their actions that morning, the crew of *Niobe's* pinnace received posthumous awards. Acting Boatswain Mattison and a petty officer received the Albert Medal in bronze, while the five other sailors with them received letters of appreciation. Similarly, some of the crew of *Highflyer's* whaler received posthumous awards. Acting Commander Triggs received the Albert Medal in gold, while the lone survivor aboard the whaler also received the Albert Medal in bronze.

(Patricia wrecked) On pier 6, the Fire Chief and seven of his men, including his deputy, also died instantly when *Mont-Blanc* exploded. Another fireman succumbed to his injuries on New Year's Eve. Patricia was a jumbled mass of wrecked machinery but, amazingly, the LaFrance fire engine company rebuilt her.

(Wells) Miraculously, Patricia's driver, Billy Wells survived. The blast catapulted him from the driver's seat and the tsunami that followed knocked him unconscious. When he came to, he was far from Pier 6, wet, completely naked, deep wounds in the muscles of his right arm. His left arm was uninjured, but bizarrely still gripped a piece of Patricia's steering wheel. Wells spent two days on a hospital floor waiting for a bed and a further five months in hospital recuperating. The LaFrance company presented Wells with the remaining piece of the steering wheel. Although these seamen and fireman were the first to die, the time between their deaths and 1,600 others was imperceptible: it only took half a second for the blast wave to reach its maximum destructive power.

(Rescue) Within seconds of the explosion, some of the surviving residents of Halifax and Dartmouth instinctively began the grim task of helping the injured - and recovering the dead - from homes, work places and other buildings. Others slipped into a catatonic stupor, frozen by the enormity of what had just happened. Initial rescue attempts were unorganized. Pockets of bleeding and dazed survivors throughout the devastated area spontaneously started to dig through the rubble - many with their bare hands.

In particular, family members who survived the explosion began a frantic search for their loved ones in the giant jigsaw jumble of burning, smoking ruins. Other relatives outside the devastated zone at the time - mostly men at their workplaces - attempted to return to their homes and families as quickly as possible. This task was made much more difficult as widespread destruction had wiped out many landmarks and covered streets in debris, making it difficult to know exactly where one was.

(Chambers) Royal Navy Rear-Admiral Bertram chambers, port convoy officer, noted: "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 [a game similar to pick-up sticks] on a gigantic scale."

(Fire) Sadly, with hundreds of small fires burning uncontrollably throughout the north end, there were too few able-bodied people immediately available to help the many victims trapped in the wreckage of their homes or other structures. As a result, several succumbed to the horrible death of being slowly burned alive before they could be freed. Additionally, Halifax - like other Canadian cities of its size at the time - was ill-equipped municipally to handle a disaster the magnitude and scope of the explosion.

(Police) The police force consisted of 39 men: Chief Frank Hanrahan, one detective, eight sergeants and 29 constables. In addition, the department recently hired eight temporary men to help deal with increased crime caused by the war.

(Fire) After the explosion, 32 permanent and 120 volunteer firefighters remained to confront an impossible job. They possessed seven steam engines, two chemical engines, eight hose wagons and four ladder trucks - all horse-drawn - to assist them. Additional equipment and firemen from across the province started to arrive by train later that day. Unfortunately, most of their hoses proved useless as their threads were not standardized with Halifax's. As well, there were no establishments such as today's public safety or emergency measures organizations to take charge in a disaster and coordinate an orderly, timely response.

(Hospital) Halifax had a number of public, military and private hospitals - remember publicly-funded universal health care did not exist at the time - such as the Victoria General, shown here. Together, they contained perhaps 1,000 beds. In the end, hospitals treated about 4,000 victims and private doctors saw many hundreds more, while about 2,500 required hospitalization. One of the military hospitals - the Pier 2 casualty clearing station - had been heavily damaged in the blast.

(Emergency Hospital) Soon all these hospitals - and several instant makeshift ones - overflowed with a jumble of confused and injured humanity. At the height of the relief efforts, more than 40 hospitals were in operation, many of them fully or partially staffed by military personnel. In the first hours before outside help arrived, overworked medical staff laboured to the point of exhaustion - and beyond. When certain anaesthetics ran out, doctors performed operations without them.

(Lisner) Some victims died before medical staff could get to them. And for many of those who survived the explosion but were physically or psychologically scarred, recuperation became a lifelong undertaking. Archibald MacMechan, director of the Halifax disaster record office, noted, "Camp Hill will almost be a synonym for horror...the sights were terrible...broken bones, scalds, burns due to the contact with stoves or boilers, contusions, maiming, internal injuries - but undoubtedly the most ghastly wounds were those inflicted by the flying glass. Heads and faces, bodies, limbs, were rent and gashed in all conceivable ways. Huge pieces of flesh were gouged out by glass."

(Stretcher) The initial, unorganized rescue initiatives were quickly superseded by systematic rescue and recovery efforts. There was one reason why these secondary efforts were established so quickly: the large army and naval presence in Halifax.

(Officers) Major-General Thomas Benson, in the picture shown standing centre, bottom step at the side entrance to what is now 36 Canadian Brigade Group Headquarters with his staff, was General Officer Commanding Military District 6 (Nova Scotia) and had immediately offered his troops to the civilian authorities for any assistance they could provide, a proposal quickly accepted.

Quite simply, if it were not for more than 5,000 Canadian and British soldiers and a large number of Canadian, British and American sailors in the city, more people would have died, more property damage would have occurred and quite possibly a degree of anarchy might have prevailed. Soldiers prepare for land warfare their entire uniformed life, and the monumental battles of the First World War gave added impetus to this training. The destruction wrought on Halifax was in every way comparable to the devastation the war brought to European communities in war zones.

(Bell) Lieutenant Colonel Frank Mckelvey Bell, Assistant Director Of Medical Services, Military District 6, noted, "I have never seen anything on the battlefield equal to the scenes of destruction that I witnessed in Halifax today."

(Dead) Soldiers and sailors - assisted by surviving policemen, firefighters and others - dug through the rubble, searching for survivors; fighting fires, set up first aid posts, administered first aid; evacuated victims to hospitals or other medical facilities; collected and delivered the dead and provided or delivered

food, clothing and blankets as well as hundreds of other items, including supplies to board up blown-out windows and doors; and guarded against looters, even though the army and navy had suffered casualties and damage to their facilities. Owners of serviceable cars, trucks and horse-drawn wagons showed up spontaneously or were asked to transport victims to medical facilities. If they did not volunteer, their vehicles were forcibly confiscated.

(Ambulance) As mentioned earlier, among the 5,000 soldiers were 600 medical personnel previously mentioned, along with military treatment facilities throughout the city, all of which were a godsend when it came to coping with the wide range and number of injured citizens. Remarkably - with the possible exception of the first day - due to the large number of military medical personnel already in Halifax, plus the speedy influx of doctors and nurses from the outside, there was never a shortage of medical staff. Soon, emergency hospitals were set up by CAMC personnel in several public buildings, and either staffed by them or in conjunction with civilian medical personnel.

(Telegrams) Major-General Willoughby Gwatkin, Chief of the General Staff in Ottawa sent a telegram to Major-General Benson, Commanding Military District 6: "Urgent. Is there any possible way in which Militia Council can assist?" To which Benson replied: "Many thanks. Situation well in hand. Full report later."

(Situation report) Later that day, Benson sent a situation report to Gwatkin, summarizing the day. According to Benson afterwards, the troops stationed in Halifax "worked day and night to do all that was possible to assist all concerned in this terrible disaster."

(Nine soldier scenes) The large presence of soldiers is shown in the following series of photos. You will note that in the first few, we see only soldiers engaged in rescue and recovery, and then some civilians start to appear in later ones. Even then, there is no photo in which only civilians are present. I'm not going to comment on these, but let them speak for themselves. In photos with both soldiers and civilians, the soldiers can always be distinguished by their distinctive military headdress.

(Lismer) Soldiers also appear in sketches made on the spot. At the time, English-born Canadian artist Arthur Lismer had been president of the Victoria School of Art and Design since 1916, now known as NASCAD.

(Ship) In wartime Halifax, he was inspired by shipping and naval activity in the port and made several paintings. His work came to the attention of Lord Beaverbrook, head of the Canadian War Records Office in London, which sponsored war artists, and arranged for Lismer to become one of them. When the explosion occurred, Lismer was at home in Bedford, about to start his breakfast. His home was undamaged, but he immediately set off for Halifax, where he found the school - the two top floors of what is now the 5 Fishermen Restaurant - had been badly damaged, but did take the time to draw a series of pen and ink sketches in the immediate aftermath of the explosion. I'm going to show you five of them, all of which portray soldiers helping in some way, either front and centre or in the background:

(The hour of horror in devastated Richmond)

(The greater loss beneath the ruins)

(The loved one)

(And the poor dead were piled...)

(St Joseph's Church)

(Niobe) Immediate help also came from several Canadian, British and American warships and merchant vessels at anchor in Halifax harbour.

(Sailors) *Niobe* sent several sailors ashore, along with (Highflyer/Changuinola) His Majesty's Ships [HMS] *Highflyer* and *Changuinola*, (Morill/Old Colony) the US Coast Guard Cutter *Morrill* and the United States Ship [USS] *Old Colony*, which (Sailors) immediately sent sailors ashore to assist. They systematically combed the wreckage for survivors, set up temporary first aid stations and transported the injured to hospitals or the larger British and American vessels with medical facilities.

(Old Colony) Rescuers took many of the injured from other ships and along the waterfront to *Old Colony*, which, although not a hospital ship, was quickly converted into one by members of the CAMC.

(Tacoma/Von Steuben) The US Navy cruisers *Tacoma* and *Von Steuben* were nearby in the North Atlantic and saw the cloud from the explosion. Not knowing what to expect, they immediately changed course, headed for the wrecked city and arrived by early afternoon.

(Patrol) At the request of General Benson, one of their first tasks was to assist soldiers patrolling the downtown business district overnight to prevent looting from smashed storefronts and give tired Canadian soldiers on duty all day an opportunity to rest.

(Pass) Access to the devastated area was strictly controlled, with a pass authorized by the chief of police required for entry.

(Lismer) Even this Lismer sketch shows a soldier on guard duty during the snowstorm that hit Halifax that night.

(Tents) By 8 p.m., soldiers had erected 400 tents equipped with wooden floors, cots, blankets, light and heat on the common in front of the Armouries to see to the immediate needs of the homeless or those without adequate shelter, plus a 250-bed emergency marquee hospital. The tents were barely used however, partly due to a snowstorm the next day, but also because most civilians did not believe a tent could provide adequate shelter.

(Armouries) In the succeeding days, the Halifax Armouries were also used as a food distribution point for those whose homes had been destroyed or rendered unliveable.

(Camp Hill) Neighbouring military districts sent 34 medical officers and 54 nursing sisters to augment those in Halifax, as well as additional medical and other supplies. Here injured survivors are being delivered to Camp Hill. Now, observe these photos of emergency medical facilities and you will see CAMC personnel in every one of them:

(St Mary's) Army medical orderlies stand outside St Mary's College on Windsor Street, turned into a 150-bed hospital by the Boston Red Cross unit.

(Injured military) And here we see injured soldiers and sailors recovering in a temporary medical facility, watched over by two CAMC nursing sisters.

(Women/kids) This is a women's and children's ward in a temporary hospital, and off to the left we see a male medical orderly from the CAMC.

(Gym) This is a temporary hospital ward set up in a school gym. Note three of the five nurses are CAMC nursing sisters.

(YMCA) This is another temporary ward set up in the YMCA on Barrington Street. In the upper right corner are a number of CAMC personnel.

(Bandages) Here are medical personnel rolling bandages; three of them are CAMC: two nursing sisters and an orderly.

(Train) Finally, this shot of injured personnel being evacuated by train shows them being delivered by a military ambulance and military personnel assisting to load them on the train.

Soldiers and sailors carried out this rescue and recovery work despite the deaths of 22 sailors and 18 soldiers - either killed outright or died of injuries later - injuries to several hundred others and extensive damage to many of their facilities.

(Lisner pier 2) This is another Lisner sketch, one of the Pier 2 casualty clearing station before the explosion, (Pier 2 aft) while this is a photo of the same facility after the explosion.

(Wellington Barracks before) Here is what the officers' quarters at Wellington Barracks looked like before the explosion, (Wellington Barracks after) and this is what it looked like after the explosion, (Wellington Barracks after) and a closer shot.

(Wellington Barracks Quartermaster) Here is the Quartermaster stores and fuel yard, (Wellington Barracks married quarters) and here is a shot of the married quarters (Wellington Barracks married quarters) and another one.

(Drydock) Naval facilities suffered similar damage, such as the Drydock, with *Niobe* making smoke on the right, (Royal Naval College of Canada/barracks) the Royal Naval College of Canada housed in the former Royal Navy hospital as well as the naval barracks suffered damage, (Timber) as did the timber store, (CD 74) drifter CD 74 and dockside buildings, (Brick) and even brick buildings in the Dockyard.

(Morgue) Five private undertakers worked in the two communities: three in Halifax and two in Dartmouth. Because these firms could not even begin to cope with the dead, the mortuary committee established a temporary morgue in a central location for unidentified and unclaimed bodies. This arrangement would also make it easier for people searching for lost loved ones. Officials selected the basement of this building, the Chebucto Road school (today the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts) as the morgue's location. As soon as word got out and even before it was ready for use, bodies started to arrive, stacked outside the building until army engineers completed repairs.

(Bodies) Once its doors opened on December 7, soldiers began to deliver corpses from hospitals, undertakers and the devastated area. Embalmers came from across the province and further away to assist overwhelmed local ones. Each body was numbered, described and an exact record made of where it was found. Most of the bodies recovered from Richmond were burnt to some degree. Sometimes, the only entry made was "charred remains," or similar wording. Workers carefully catalogued personal effects and put them into numbered mortuary bags, along with any undamaged clothing. As many as 70 soldiers assisted this difficult daily work at the morgue. Another 25 to 50 servicemen formed digging and covering-in parties at various cemeteries on a daily basis. Soon, a steady stream of ambulances, wagons and private cars arrive at its doors, laden with the dead, from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.



(Relatives) Another continuous lineup also formed quickly: thousands of apprehensive relatives searching for their loved ones. Once bodies were positively identified, they were released to families for burial, unless they could not afford it, in which case the mortuary committee took responsibility.

(Funeral) Burials of unidentified bodies began on December 17. Ninety-five badly charred remains were interred that day. The funeral service took place beforehand in the Chebucto Road schoolyard, witnessed by about 3,000 people.

(Band) To the music of the Princess Louise Fusiliers band, soldiers carried wreath-adorned caskets from the basement and laid them in rows outside. Protestant and Roman Catholic services followed. Afterward, soldiers loaded the coffins onto trucks, took them to the Fairview or Mount Olivet cemeteries and placed them in waiting graves.

(Unidentified) Additional burials took place until Christmas Eve. Authorities buried a large number of unidentified remains in a bare patch of ground next to the new railway cutting through the western side of the peninsula toward the new station. More bodies continued to be found until well into the spring, when workers completed proper clearance of the wreckage. In the end, about 250 bodies remained unidentified.

(Scene) Halifax's role as the Canadian city most involved in the war effort - a function that led to the explosion in the first place - was also the main reason why the reaction to the disaster was so quick and coordinated. The important role the army and navy played in the rescue and recovery operations has never been formally recognized, not on the Halifax municipal website, at annual memorial services or elsewhere. Although many residents displayed a long-standing ill-will towards the navy, which they blamed for the explosion in the first place, no such accusations were ever leveled against the army. It is a mystery why the contributions of the soldiers and sailors who offered so much in the explosion's aftermath have never been officially acknowledged, surely a bizarre oversight that has continued far too long it seems to me.

(Cover) I must mention that I have copies of my new book about the disaster, *6-12-17: The Halifax Explosion*, available for sale today. The book normally sells for \$34.95, but my publisher has reduced it to \$22.95 as a Xmas special, so \$23 cash will get you an autographed copy.

(???) Before that, I'd be happy to hear any personal or family stories that anyone may have about the explosion, answer any questions that I can or take any comments anyone may have. Thank you.

<p>John Boileau is a retired officer of the Canadian Armed Forces. He is a frequent and well known writer on defence matters, and is the author of several military history books. This work is the sole opinion of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of the Canadian Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the Royal United Services Institute of Nova Scotia. The author may be contacted by email at: <a href="mailto:RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com">RUSINovaScotia@gmail.com</a>.</p>
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