



Aftershock: The Halifax Explosion and the Persecution of Pilot Francis Mackey

Janet Maybee

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On December 6, 1917, harbour pilot Francis Mackey was guiding Mont Blanc, a French munitions ship, into Bedford Basin to join a convoy across the Atlantic when it was rammed by Belgian Relief vessel Imo. The resulting massive explosion destroyed Halifax's north end and left at least two thousand people dead, including pilot William Hayes aboard Imo.

Who was to blame? Federal government and naval officials found in Pilot Mackey a convenient target for public anger. Charged with manslaughter, he was imprisoned, villainized in the press, and denied his pilot's license even after the charges were dropped. A century later he is still unfairly linked to the tragedy.

Through interviews with Mackey's relatives, transcripts, letters, and newly exposed government documents, author Janet Maybee explores the circumstances leading up to the Halifax Explosion, the question of fault, and the impact on the pilot and his family of the unjust, deliberate persecution that followed.

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