



The Town That Died: The story of the world's greatest man-made explosion before Hiroshima

Michael Bird

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On Thursday, December 6th 1917, a French freighter loaded with over 2,500 tons of high explosives collided with another vessel in the harbour of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and caught fire. At exactly 9.06am she blew up. The explosions, which was seen and heard fifty-two miles away, unleashed a man-made destructive force unequalled in power until the first atomic bomb. It levelled the Halifax waterfront, wiped out a square mile of the city from the face of the earth and sent an enormous wave crashing over the piers to tear ocean-going ships from their moorings. The Town That Died tells in full the whole story of this appalling disaster, which led to thousands of deaths and injuries while the homeless numbered in tens of thousands. Set against the background of the lives of many of the people involved, it tells exactly what happened on that morning, of the cruel twist of fate that meant it was impossible to rescue many of the people trapped in their burning homes and the bitter legal battle that was fought to establish who was to blame for the catastrophe. Michael Bird spent over a year researching this book, travelling over 7,000 miles to piece together the incredible story by interviewing survivors, discovering contemporary letters, diaries and newspapers and official documents and reports that had not been previously available. There is much that will shock in this study of human behaviour at a time when men and women were tested to breaking point. Predominantly, this is the story of the great courage, endurance and self-sacrifice shown by thousands of ordinary people when they found themselves caught up in the horror of The Town That Died.

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