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Survivors, residents mark anniversary of Halifax Explosion

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HALIFAX - About 100 people braved a winter storm Sunday to gather for the 92nd anniversary of the Halifax Explosion in honour of the thousands who died in one of the most devastating accidents in Canadian history.

"I think it just gets us to remember a little bit of what was experienced that day," Halifax Mayor Peter Kelly said at Fort Needham Memorial Park.

"And this just pales in comparison. This is just the weather, they had to suffer through everything else."

On Dec. 6, 1917, nearly 2,000 people were killed and 9,000 injured by an explosion when two ships collided in Halifax harbour. One of them was the SS Mont-Blanc, a French munitions ship. The other ship was from Norway.

The resulting blast destroyed much of the city, leaving 6,000 people homeless.

In the days that followed, coffin after coffin lined the streets of Halifax.

"Not only did it suffer badly in the blast of the explosion, but most of the buildings were made of wood, and fire quickly spread throughout, finishing off the devastation," said Janet Kitz, a local historian. "Every building in Halifax that was suitable was converted into a hospital or shelter. The freight cars . . . became homes for the homeless."

A small number of survivors attended an indoor ceremony Sunday.

"My mother I guess, she was downstairs, doing her breakfast dishes, thinking of all the things she was going to do for Christmas," Mary Murphy said. "And she woke up in the hospital. And somebody told her there had been an explosion and she thought this was something in her own house."

George Sims recalled the blizzard that followed the explosion, similar to the weather in the city on Sunday.

"All the window come in on me when I was eating my breakfast," he said. "The skylight was broken. The snow was coming in the next day."

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