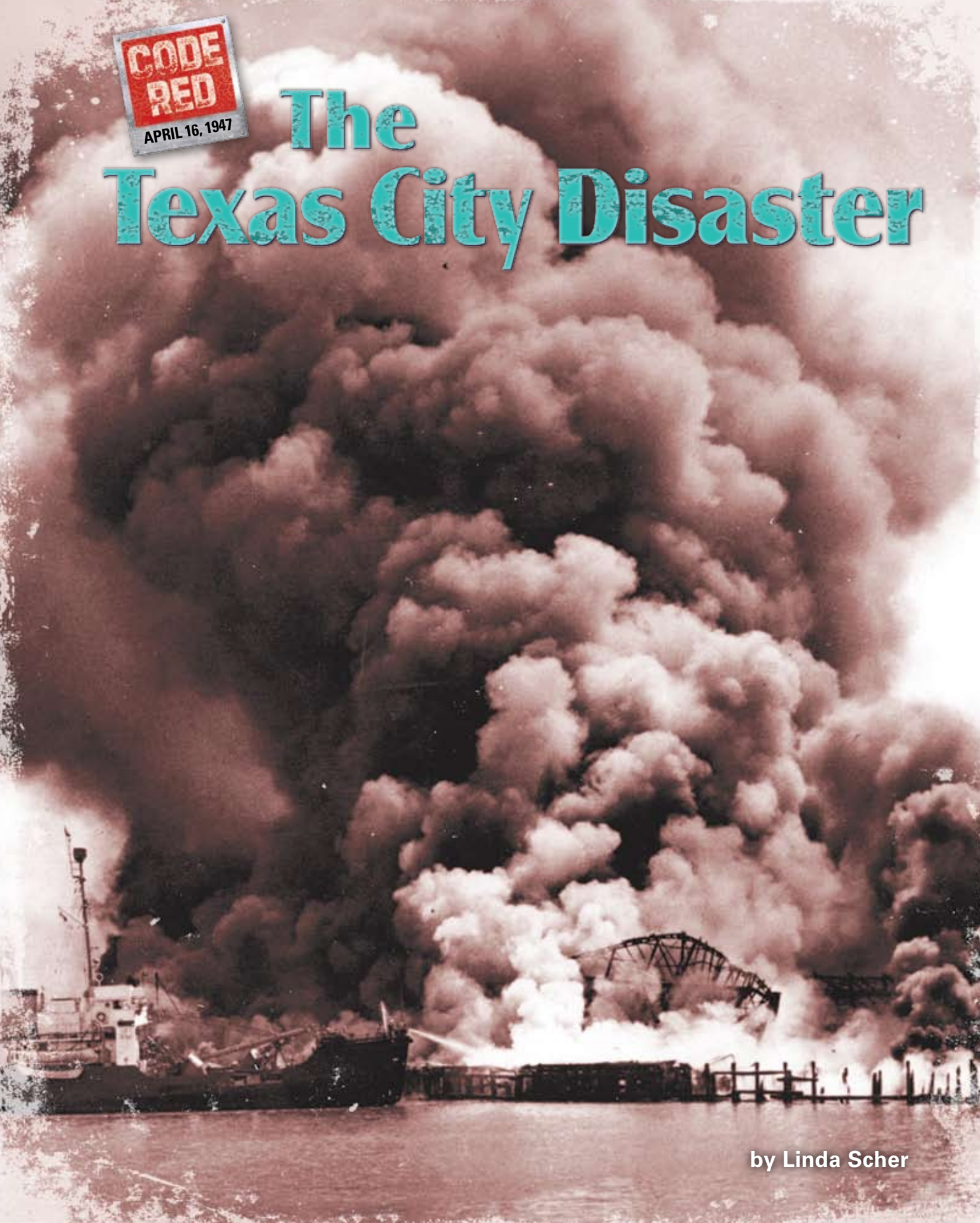


**CODE
RED**
APRIL 16, 1947

The Texas City Disaster



by Linda Scher



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**Consultant: Archie P. McDonald
Director, East Texas Historical Association**

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HUNDREDS DIE IN TEXAS EXPLOSION

Evacuat

Poison Gas S Over Area In V Fire Menaces

HOUSTON, TEX.—The Houston police today said that Texas City police stations that Texas City police ordered immediate evacuation of the damaged town, "because of gases believed to be poisonous."

Ten Mile Co Of Smoke T Over Blasted

(That News, Houston Press Reported to reach the scene of the Texas City explosion Saturday.)

TEXAS CITY, TEX.—There is in this town on the Galveston Bay, an apocalyptic everywhere.

On our way into town we passed balloons floating in the sky with the

Hundreds Watched Explosion

(Editor's Note: Mr. W. H. Linn, research group leader at Missouri Chemical Company, was among hundreds who watched the explosion from an airplane about a day after Texas City, the scene of the following account by Linn.)

By W. H. Linn

HOUSTON, TEX.—I

was looking out the window of the Missouri plant about eight miles from the scene when a French coupe

The vessel, it developed, had been loading nitrate when our tanks from our main of-

Before we knew it, up to 100 Texas City citizens were lined up along the waterfront to watch other ships and city

Strikes

all of a sudden there was a great explosion, the ship

Explosion in the ship was not surprising to the Texas City residents, and our visiting the

After the explosion, I saw that the ship had been hit by a

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s Felt Over e Industrial n Gulf Coast

A Coast Guard boat today received reports of the scene of the Texas City explosion, and the dead at 200 to 2,000, and injuries

TEX.—As officials grappled today with wreckage, in an almost impossible task to determine the number of dead and injured in explosions and fires that swept over the industrial area today, estimates varied widely, by mid-afternoon, from 200 to 700 killed. The

and among oil refineries flanking the disaster area with black ten miles. Bud Myers, Houston

cars leading from the area were

states of the dead ran from 200 to

men placed the total at more

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Loading the *Grandcamp*

It was 8:00 A.M. on April 16, 1947. **Dockworker** Julio Luna was loading heavy bags into the French ship *Grandcamp* in Texas City, Texas. The paper bags held **fertilizer** bound for farmers in Europe.



The fertilizer seemed harmless. It was just something farmers added to soil to help plants grow. However, it was made of **ammonium nitrate**. This chemical is also used to make bombs. When it gets very hot, it can explode. No one on the ship knew how dangerous the fertilizer could be.

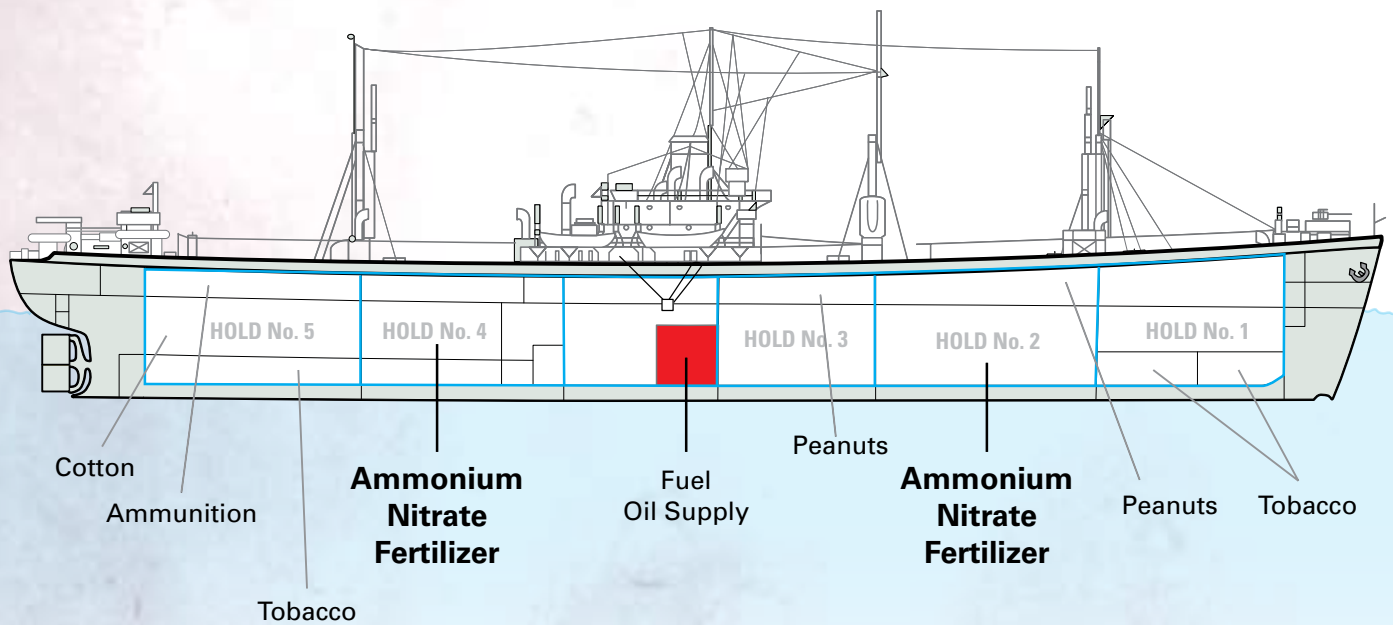


Today, warning labels are placed on bags of ammonium nitrate.

The *Grandcamp* was 437 feet (133 m) long. It was almost 80 feet (24 m) longer than a football field.

Dangerous Cargo

As men dropped the paper bags filled with fertilizer into the *Grandcamp's* **hold**, some ripped. They were still hot after arriving from the factory. Bits of warm paper and loose fertilizer may have mixed with other **cargo**. The ship now held the perfect **fuel** for a fire.



This diagram shows where cargo was stored in the *Grandcamp's* hold.

Along with fertilizer, the *Grandcamp's* cargo included cotton, peanuts, and tobacco.

Blue smoke began to rise from the large pile of bags. “I smell paper burning!” Luna yelled. Deep in the ship’s hold, a fire had begun.

Dockworkers rushed to pour water on the flames, but the fire still spread. The ship’s captain feared more water would ruin his cargo. So he ordered his crew to pump steam into the hold instead. The French captain’s decision would soon have deadly results.



The Texas City dock area, before the fire

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About the Author

Linda Scher has written several fiction and nonfiction books. She also writes for *Kids Discover*, a magazine for young people.

She has a nephew who is a full-time firefighter with the fire department in Raleigh, North Carolina.



The Texas City Disaster

The cargo ship *Grandcamp* was docked in Texas City, Texas, loaded with bags of fertilizer bound for farmers in Europe. The fertilizer seemed harmless, but it contained a substance that is also used to make bombs.

When blue smoke began to rise from the bags, dockworkers rushed to put out the fire that had begun. Yet the flames kept growing. They caused an explosion that set roofs ablaze, hurled fireballs toward tanks filled with dangerous chemicals, and even created a giant tidal wave. The terrible chain of events formed the worst industrial accident in U.S. history and raised questions about safety that would eventually reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

The *Challenger* Space Shuttle Explosion

Emergency at Three Mile Island

The *Exxon Valdez*'s Deadly Oil Spill

The Great Chicago Fire

The *Hindenburg* Disaster

Nightmare on the *Titanic*

The Texas City Disaster

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The 2001 World Trade Center Attack

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