

0. THE SHIP - Story Preface

1. THE SHIP

2. THE COMING ONSLAUGHT

3. SURPRISE ATTACK

4. DEATH AT SEA

5. S-13 STRIKES AGAIN



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-L12207
Foto: August 1. Juli 1945

The MV *Wilhelm Gustloff*—in this image depicted as a hospital ship—was a German KdF flagship during 1937-1945. It was constructed by the Blohm & Voss shipyards. The ship was named after Wilhelm Gustloff, the assassinated German leader of the Swiss Nazi party. Credit: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-L12207 / Augst / CC-BY-SA 3.0

It was January 30, 1945. The Third Reich was collapsing. Admiral Doenitz, head of the German Navy (*Kriegsmarine*), had ordered the *Gustloff* to evacuate U-boat crew cadets.

Leaving *Gotenhafen*, its port of four years, the ship would also ferry civilians. Opening the gangplanks to a rush of people seeking safety, the ship's captains (both civilian and military) were left with too many refugees on board a ship with too few life boats.

For a time, the *Gustloff* had served as home base for U-boat training crews. It also served as a hospital ship. One of the Reich's great vessels, its passengers could hear Adolf Hitler live whenever the Fuhrer addressed the country.

On the night of January 30, 1945, the Fuhrer gave one of his speeches. He was finished at about 9 p.m. A few minutes later, the *Wilhelm Gustloff* would also be finished, mortally wounded by three direct torpedo hits from a Soviet submarine.

Most folks think the *Titanic* was the deadliest maritime disaster of all time. But its death toll (1,522) was significantly less than the *Wilhelm Gustloff's*. There were so many people crowded into the ship and so many bodies in the Baltic Sea that January night, historians can't be sure of the count.

Their best estimate? Somewhere between 9,300 - 10,146 victims.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-SHIP-Wilhelm-Gustloff-Deadliest-Shipwreck>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-SHIP-Wilhelm-Gustloff-Deadliest-Shipwreck>

Media Stream



Gustloff in Harbor

Image online, courtesy the compunews.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gustloff-in-Harbor>



Map Depicting Gotenhafen

Image online, courtesy the lasegundaguerra.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Map-Depicting-Gotenhafen>



Gustloff in Port

Image online, courtesy the compunews.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gustloff-in-Port>



The Downfall of the Gustloff

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Downfall-of-the-Gustloff>



Gustloff and Its Life Boats

Image provided here by the German Federal Archives. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0 DE.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gustloff-and-Its-Life-Boats>

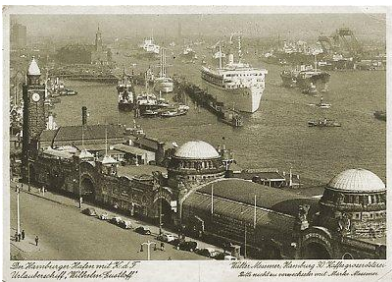


Interior of the Gustloff - Picture of Hitler

Image online, courtesy the danzig.online.pl website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Interior-of-the-Gustloff-Picture-of-Hitler>



Wilhelm Gustloff in the Harbor

Image online, courtesy the danzig.online.pl website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wilhelm-Gustloff-in-the-Harbor>

Wilhelm Gustloff Sinks

In lieu of any actual pictures showing the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, artists have produced their interpretations of how the event must have appeared when it occurred on the night of January 30, 1945.

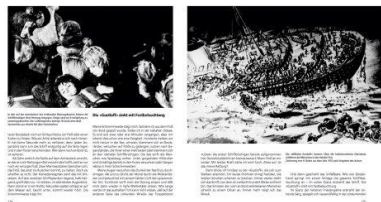
The image on the right side of this page depicts such an illustration. The tragedy resulted in a very large loss of life because so many people had boarded the ship (in an effort to flee the advancing Soviet army).

The images are from a German-language book and website.

Image online via Wikipedia Deutsche.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wilhelm-Gustloff-Sinks>



Baltic Sea - Where the Gustloff Foundered

Map, courtesy Perry Castaneda Library, University of Texas at Austin.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Baltic-Sea-Where-the-Gustloff-Foundered>