



0. SURPRISE ATTACK - Story Preface

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5. S-13 STRIKES AGAIN

The captain of the Soviet submarine S-13, Alexander Marinesko, was posthumously made a Hero of the Soviet Union in 1990. This Russian stamp—â€¢ 304, from 1996—commemorates his vessel, the S-13. A. Pletnev designed the stamp; M. Silyanova engraved it. In addition to sinking the *Gustloff*, Marinesko and S-13 also sank the *Steuben* (another German transport vessel). Around 3,300 people aboard the *Steuben* died while about 300 individuals survived. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

As the *Gustloff* left Gotenhafen shortly after noon on January 30, tugboats pulled the overcrowded ship from her berth and into the Bay of Danzig. She would travel west to Stettin.

The weather was not favorable. Karl Hoffman, a surviving crew member, describes the situation:

The weather was bad: Wind strength of 7, snow, ten degrees below zero, ice flows on the water's surface.

Once into the open Baltic, the Gustloff's decks were slick with ice. Hoffman continues:

It was freezing cold as layers of ice began to form on the deck. In order to be ready for any emergency we crewmen had to constantly work to remove ice from the guns. A small mine sweeper patrolled in front of the Gustloff in search of mines. Night fell and it became even colder. Below decks, the high spirits of the refugees began to wane as many became seasick. But most were lulled into a false sense of security, believing that in a few days they would reach Stettin or the coast of Denmark.

A Soviet sub, S-13, was lurking in the Baltic's frigid waters. Her captain, Alexander Marinesko, could see the *Gustloff* was about 20 miles offshore. Not knowing which ship he had sighted, he presumed her crew was trying to avoid submerged attack ships - like his - which required deep water.

Marinesko faced a tough decision. He was in water fairly shallow for a submarine (about 170 feet). If he fired torpedoes at the unsuspecting *Gustloff*, and if the *Gustloff* returned fire, he would have trouble diving his boat.

Risking counter measures from the German ship, Marinesko's crew used their night sight and fired four torpedoes. The *Gustloff* took a direct hit from three. Hoffman describes the scene of panic aboard the stricken ship:

Thousands of people immediately broke into a terrible panic. Many plunged overboard into the icy waves of the Baltic Sea. At first the ship leaned to starboard under the force of the explosion, but then righted herself, only to suffer another hit by the forecastle. We were off the coast of Stolpmunde, Pommerania. We immediately began to broadcast an SOS and fire signal flares...The desperate crowd of thousands had only one thought: to reach the upper decks, away from the massive flood of water.

The ship sank in about an hour, not far from the Danish island of Bornholm.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SURPRISE-ATTACK-Wilhelm-Gustloff-Deadliest-Shipwreck)

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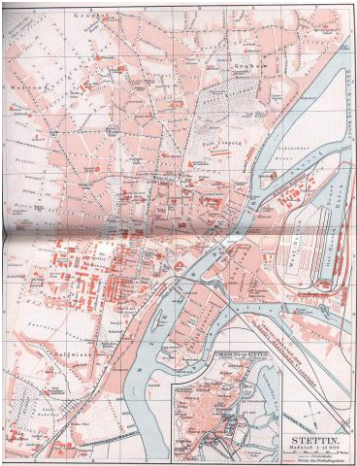


Wilhelm Gustloff - Departing Grotenhafen

Image online, courtesy the peter-rathay.de website.

View this asset at:

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



Map Depicting Stettin

Image online, courtesy stettin-heimatkreis.de website.

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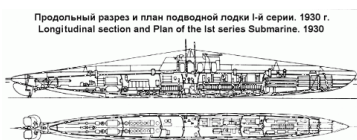


Karl Hoffman - Wilhelm Gustloff Survivor

Image online, courtesy the lewistonschools.net website.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Karl-Hoffman-Wilhelm-Gustloff-Survivor>



Soviet Submarine

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Gustloff Disaster - Soviet Sub in Coastal Waters

Image online, courtesy the Russian language website, korabley.net.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gustloff-Disaster-Soviet-Sub-in-Coastal-Waters>



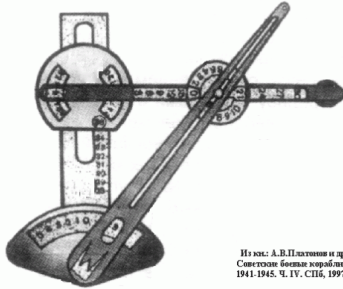
Alexander Marinesko - Captain of Soviet Sub S-13

Image online, courtesy the brazilian website, escommbrasil.com.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Alexander-Marinesko-Captain-of-Soviet-Sub-S-13>

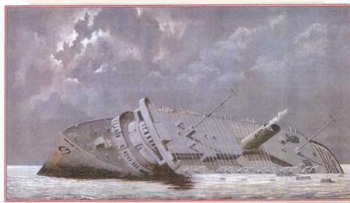
Ночной прицел ЛН
The Night sight LN



Soviet Submarine - Night Sight

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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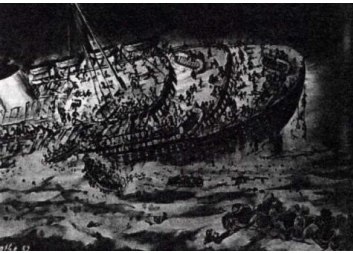


Wilhelm Gustloff - Direct Torpedo Strike

Image online, via Wilhelm Gustloff Museum.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wilhelm-Gustloff-Direct-Torpedo-Strike>



Gustloff Passengers - Plunged Overboard

Image online, courtesy the youtube.com website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Gustloff-Passengers-Plunged-Overboard>



Wilhelm Gustloff - Fleeing Germans Board the Ship

Video clip from *Last Voyage of the Gustloff*, a documentary combining historic footage with recreated scenes from a three-hour, made-for-German-television film (in 2008) directed by Joseph Vilsmaier entitled *Ship of No Return: The Last Voyage of the Gustloff* (or, in German, *Die Gustloff*).

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Wilhelm Gustloff - Panic Among the Refugees

Video clip from *Last Voyage of the Gustloff*, a documentary combining historic footage with recreated scenes from a three-hour, made-for-German-television film (in 2008) directed by Joseph Vilsmaier entitled *Ship of No Return: The Last Voyage of the Gustloff* (or, in German, *Die Gustloff*).

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Wilhelm Gustloff - Torpedoed by Soviet Submarine

Video clip from *Last Voyage of the Gustloff*, a documentary combining historic footage with recreated scenes from a three-hour, made-for-German-television film (in 2008) directed by Joseph Vilsmaier entitled *Ship of No Return: The Last Voyage of the Gustloff* (or, in German, *Die Gustloff*).

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Wilhelm Gustloff - Survivors Tell Their Stories

Video clip from *Last Voyage of the Gustloff*, a documentary combining historic footage with recreated scenes from a three-hour, made-for-German-television film (in 2008) directed by Joseph Vilsmaier entitled *Ship of No Return: The Last Voyage of the Gustloff* (or, in German, *Die Gustloff*).

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Wilhelm Gustloff - Deadliest Shipwreck

Video clip from *Last Voyage of the Gustloff*, a documentary combining historic footage with recreated scenes from a three-hour, made-for-German-television film (in 2008) directed by Joseph Vilsmaier entitled *Ship of No Return: The Last Voyage of the Gustloff* (or, in German, *Die Gustloff*).

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