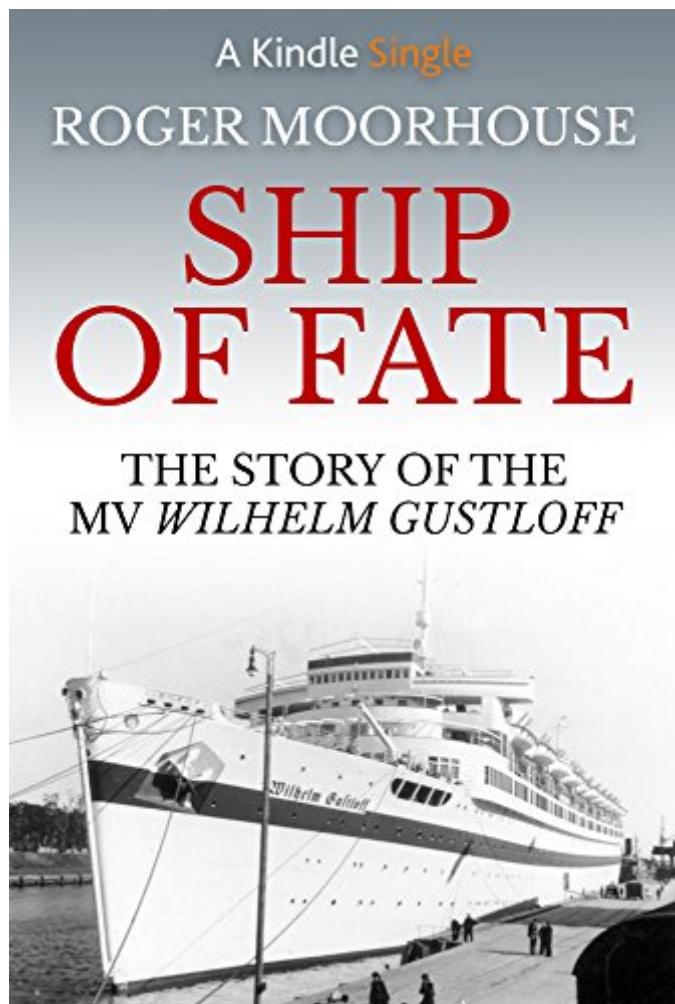


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# Ship Of Fate: The Story Of The MV Wilhelm Gustloff (Kindle Single)



## Synopsis

Hitler's Titanic - the deadliest and most secret catastrophe in the history of maritime warfare. When the Wilhelm Gustloff was sunk by a Soviet submarine, with the loss of nearly 10,000 lives in January 1945, it wrote itself an unenviable record in the history books as the deadliest maritime disaster of all time. Yet, aside from its grim fate in the icy waters of the Baltic, the story of the Gustloff is a fascinating one, which sheds light on a number of little-known aspects of the wider history of the Third Reich. Launched in Hamburg in 1937, the luxury liner Wilhelm Gustloff was originally to be christened the "Adolf Hitler", but instead was named after the Swiss Nazi leader, who had been assassinated by a Jewish gunman the previous year. The ship was the pride of the Nazi Labour Movement, and would be run as a cruise liner by the subsidiary KdF, an organisation responsible for German workers' leisure time, cruising the Baltic and Scandinavian coast, seducing its passengers with the apparent benefits of belonging to the Nazi "national community". The Gustloff also served a vital propaganda function for Hitler's Reich. It was moored in London in 1938 to allow Austrian citizens in the city to participate in the plebiscite over Hitler's annexation of the country and the following year, it brought the elite German "Condor Legion" home from service alongside Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War. When war came in 1939, the Gustloff was used as a hospital ship and ferried wounded soldiers and sailors home from the 1940 campaign in Narvik. Later, moored in the harbour at Gdynia, it served as a floating barracks for U-Boat crews undergoing training. In 1945, the Wilhelm Gustloff would meet its nemesis. That spring, it would be requisitioned for "Operation Hannibal", the attempt to evacuate civilians, soldiers and officials westwards from the German eastern provinces threatened by the Soviet advance. While many ships made numerous crossings, the Gustloff would not survive her first voyage. Packed to the gunnels with desperate evacuees, she was torpedoed off the Pomeranian coast on January 30 - ironically the twelfth anniversary of Hitler coming to power - with the loss of almost 10,000 lives. The story of the Wilhelm Gustloff's sinking in the freezing waters of the Baltic is dramatic and it has rarely been satisfactorily told in the English language. This gripping Kindle Single will explore the history of the German ship that suffered the deadliest maritime disaster of all time. Roger Moorhouse is a critically-acclaimed freelance historian specialising in modern German and Central European history. Published in 15 languages, he is the author of the international bestseller *Berlin at War* (Bodley Head, 2010), and *The Devil's Alliance* which was published in the UK & US in the autumn of 2014. He is also author of the eBook *His Struggle: Hitler in Landsberg, 1924*. Endeavour Press is the UK's leading independent digital publisher. For more information on our titles please sign up to our newsletter at [www.endeavourpress.com](http://www.endeavourpress.com). Each week

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## **Customer Reviews**

The sinking of the German liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* in 1945 was the worst maritime disaster in history, with an estimated 9,250 fatalities. To put that in perspective, about 1,500 people died on the *Titanic*, and about 4,400 in the worst peacetime disaster (the *Doña Paz* in 1987). The *Gustloff* sinking has never been a secret, and was the subject of Günter Grass's short final novel, *Crabwalk*. Yet until recently, little has been known about the sinking outside Germany. True, there have been at least three books in English; the best is Dobson, Miller and Payne's *The Cruelest Night*. But it is out of print and hard to find. So Roger Moorhouse's short (66-page) introduction, *Ship of Fate: The Story of the MV Wilhelm Gustloff*, is a worthwhile addition, not least because he's done a very good job. Moorhouse begins with the ship's construction in the 1930s as a cruise liner; it was intended to take ordinary Germans on holiday as part of the Strength through Joy movement, and was a useful propaganda tool, showing that there was something à œsocialistâ • about National

Socialism. However, within two years of her launch, the war broke out and she was used as a hospital ship for the Polish and Norwegian campaigns, and then tied up in Gdynia in occupied Poland as a submarine depot ship. In January 1945 the Russians broke through Poland towards what is now the eastern border of Germany, isolating Gdynia and trapping millions of German troops and civilians. On the 30th, the Gustloff left for western Germany with about 10,500 people on board, mostly naval personnel and civilians. During the night she was hit by three torpedoes from a Russian submarine off what was then Pomerania (now part of Poland). Many were trapped below decks; others drowned or froze in the very poor weather.

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