



welcome

# Wilhelm Gustloff



unknown



history



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stories



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## events and key dates

<b>Barbarossa, Operation</b>	<p>The code name given for Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 - a decision that would ultimately prove to be the biggest mistake Hitler ever made.</p> <p>Nazi brutality during the invasion turned full-circle as the war neared its end. It provided the roots for German/East Prussian mass panic and fear of the Russians that forced thousands of refugees into ports to evacuate aboard ships like the <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i>.</p>
<b>Delivery of Wilhelm Gustloff</b>	The <i>Gustloff</i> was officially delivered by its ship builder Blohm & Voss and ready for use on March 15, 1938, where it subsequently went on an overnight test run.
<b>Frankfurter (David) arrested</b>	After Wilhelm Gustloff was shot on February 4, 1936, a manhunt was not necessary. Frankfurter showed up at a local police station in Davos and freely admitted to his actions. After initial disbelief on the part of the officer taking his confession, Frankfurter was finally locked up in his cell late the same night.
<b>Frankfurter (David) dies</b>	Frankfurter died of natural causes on July 19, 1982 in Israel. He left a wife and two children.
<b>Frankfurter (David) released from prison</b>	As the tides of World War II changed, Frankfurter applied to the Swiss government for a pardon in February 27, 1945. He was granted his wish on June 1st where he promptly was asked to leave the country and pay restitution.
<b>Frankfurter (David) trial</b>	December 9 through 14, 1936 in Chur, Switzerland. Frankfurter was found guilty and sentenced to eighteen years in prison.

<b>Great Patriotic War</b>	What the Russians call "World War II" - covering a period from 1941 through 1945. The Russians were allies of Germany until invaded in June 1941 by Hitler's <i>Operation Barbarossa</i> .
<b>Gustloff (Wilhelm) assassination</b>	February 4, 1936 in the study of his home in Davos, Switzerland. Shot four times at point-blank range by David Frankfurter, he dies almost immediately.
<b>Gustloff (Wilhelm) funeral</b>	Held in his birthplace of the northern German town of Schwerin on February 12, 1936, Gustloff is given a state funeral attended by numerous Nazi dignitaries. Hitler himself provided the eulogy.
<b>Hannibal, Operation</b>	Even today, <i>Operation Hannibal</i> remains the largest ever maritime-based evacuation. Also known as the "German Dunkirk", <i>Hannibal</i> was ordered by Admiral Dönitz in January 1945 to evacuate Germans to the West from the Gulf of Danzig region (current day Gulf of Gdansk). The <i>Gustloff</i> was one of over 1,100 ships included in the operation. Despite the <i>Gustloff's</i> tragic sinking (not to mention those of the <i>Steuben</i> and <i>Goya</i> ), <i>Hannibal</i> was considered an overwhelming success by evacuating over 2 million Germans.
<b>Hitler's 12th Anniversary Speech</b>	Hitler's last speech ever for an anniversary of Nazi ascension to power in Germany. The speech - broadcasted from the Reichstag, echoed from the ship's speakers throughout the <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i> as it made its way West. This was very dramatic because only minutes after the speech ended (around 9pm) on January 30, 1945, three torpedoes struck the <i>Gustloff</i> .  Read what Hitler said <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>January 30</b> (The date)	The date January 30 <sup>th</sup> provides eerie coincidences in the <i>Gustloff</i> story. All of the following happened on a January 30 <sup>th</sup> : Assassinated Nazi leader Wilhelm Gustloff was born in 1895. The Nazi Party came to power in Germany in 1933. In the generally accepted turning point of the war, the 6th Army was defeated at Stalingrad in 1943. Finally, of course, the <i>Gustloff</i> was torpedoed and sunk on this date in 1945.
<b>Keel laid for the <i>Gustloff</i></b> 	August 1, 1936 at Blohm & Voss shipyards in Hamburg. Robert Ley, head of the <i>DAF</i> and <i>KdF</i> drove in the ceremonial first bolt.



<b>Launching of the <i>Gustloff</i></b>	May 5, 1937 at Blohm & Voss shipyard #511 in Hamburg, Germany. It would be almost another 10 months until the ship was completed and ready for its first test run.
<b><i>Lingiad</i>, The</b>	<p>A non-competitive world gymnastics festival event in Stockholm, Sweden during late July 1939. It was named for a founding father in Swedish gymnastics and physical therapy (amusingly better known in modern times as the inventor of the "Swedish Massage").</p> <p>Over the course of two weeks, the <i>Gustloff</i> acted as a floating dormitory for over 1,000 gymnasts, who were shuttled back and forth from events via motorboat. Typical for the time, due to strict Nazi control the <i>Gustloff</i> did not tie up at port in Sweden because it was not "officially" considered an Axis ally.</p>
<b>Lübbe (Carl) dies</b>	On April 28, 1938, the <i>Gustloff's</i> first captain suffered a heart attack on the ship's first "official" cruise. It occurred while he was on the bridge during the second day of the journey to Madeira. During his short tenure, he had captained the <i>Gustloff</i> for its overnight test run, two unofficial cruises, and during its role as a floating polling station in England.
<b>Nuremberg Laws</b>	<p>Two key laws passed by the Nazi government in September 1935 that effectively (and formally) reduced Jews to second-class citizens within the "Reich". Among other things, marriages or relations between "Germans" and "Jews" were outlawed. German Jews lost political status and had their citizenship revoked to become mere "subjects". The Nuremberg laws paved the way for more severe anti-Jewish legislation that eventually stripped Jews of all human rights.</p> <p>David Frankfurter noted that these laws were a main contributor toward his desire to act against Swiss Nazi leader Wilhelm Gustloff.</p>
<b>Olympic Games Tokyo 1940</b>	During the launching of the vessel bearing his name, Robert Ley, head of the <i>DAF</i> , stated that he intended to send his <i>KdF</i> ships (including the <i>Gustloff</i> ) to Tokyo in 1940 for the planned Olympic Games. He expected that a convoy of up to 12 ships filled with workers and athletes would sail to the Far East via America. Of course, these Olympics were cancelled once World War II broke out.
<b><i>Sea Lion</i>, Operation</b>	Was the codename of Hitler's planned invasion of England in 1940 (in German: <i>Seelöwe</i> ). The <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i> was ordered to Wesermünde with many other ships to prepare for operation,

	<p>which would eventually be postponed indefinitely on September 17, 1940. The <i>Gustloff</i> (known officially as <i>Lazarettsschiff D</i> as a hospital ship) was to be stationed in Rotterdam, Netherlands to accept wounded soldiers.</p>
<b>Pegaway Rescue</b>	<p>On April 3, 1938 during the second ever voyage by the <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i>, the radio room received an SOS from an English coal steamer <i>Pegaway</i>. A victim of a unforgiving storm in the English Channel, it was damaged, rudderless and sinking.</p> <p>Captain Lübke ordered an immediate course set for the <i>Pegaway</i>, and nineteen seamen from the condemned English steamer were rescued using one of the <i>Gustloff's</i> motorboats.</p>
<b>Spanish Civil War</b>	<p>Between 1936 and 1939, Spain was in the grip of a complex civil war fought between Republicans and Nationalists. Nazi Germany provided support to the Nationalists who, under the leadership of fascist dictator Francisco Franco, were ultimately victorious.</p> <p>The conflict was considered a prime preparation/testing ground for the Nazi war machine, which provided troops, equipment and armaments. Approximately 20,000 Germans served in Spain as part of the infamous Condor Legion.</p> <p>After the civil war officially ended, in late May 1939 the <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i> was diverted from its cruise duties to the port of Vigo in Spain. Along with a convoy of German ships, the <i>Gustloff</i> picked up over 1,400 Condor Legion troops and returned them home to a triumphant welcome in Hamburg.</p>
<b>Test run of the <i>Gustloff</i></b>	<p>Once officially delivered, on March 15, 1938 the <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i> embarked on an overnight test run in the North Sea. Filled mostly with employees from the shipbuilder (Blohm &amp; Voss), it was a stormy cruise - but from most accounts leaves a very positive impression upon the participants lucky to be aboard the world's most advanced passenger cruise ship of its time.</p>
<b>World War II starts</b>	<p>World War II officially started on September 1, 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Western Poland, while Soviet Russia claimed the Eastern portion some two weeks later.</p> <p>Within three weeks, the <i>Wilhelm Gustloff</i> became a hospital ship (known as <i>Lazarettsschiff D</i>) and was stationed in the Danzig area at port in Gotenhafen. Ironically, the <i>Gustloff</i> initially treats more Polish soldiers than Germans once casualties come on board the floating medical facility.</p>