



# In Titanic's Shadow: The World's Worst Merchant Ship Disasters

*David L. Williams*

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**A collection of the 40 worst mercantile disasters in history—revealing that, despite popular belief, the *Titanic* tragedy was far from being the worst disaster at sea**

While the victims of the *Titanic* disaster at 1,507 persons accounted for a huge loss of life, each of the ships described in this book had a greater number of casualties, in some cases more than five times as many. In total, these 27 merchant ship sinkings resulted in a staggering loss of life at sea—more than 96,000 lives in total (3,840 per ship). While the circumstances of their losses were different than those of the *Titanic*, the outcome in each was no less tragic. While it is not the intention to diminish the gravity of the *Titanic* case, these lesser-known tragedies do give "the worst disaster at sea" a sobering perspective. Despite the fact that the *Titanic* disaster ranks behind so many other losses, so powerful has her name become as a representation of extreme misfortune, that it was the inevitable choice to describe some of these other events. Hence, they have come to be known as "Germany's *Titanic*" and "The *Titanic* of Japan" as just two examples. Ships include the *Lancastria*, sunk by German bombers with a loss of 3,000 British lives (Britain's worst maritime disaster); the *Ryusei Maru*, a Japanese "Hellship" loaded with 6,000 Allied POWs that was torpedoed by a US submarine; and the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a German liner packed with 7,800 civilians in operation "Hannibal" evacuation, sunk by a Russian submarine. There were no survivors and this tragedy was the worst maritime disaster of all time.

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