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IANTD EXPEDITION ***“WILHELM GUSTLOFF” 2004***

(Official Press Release)

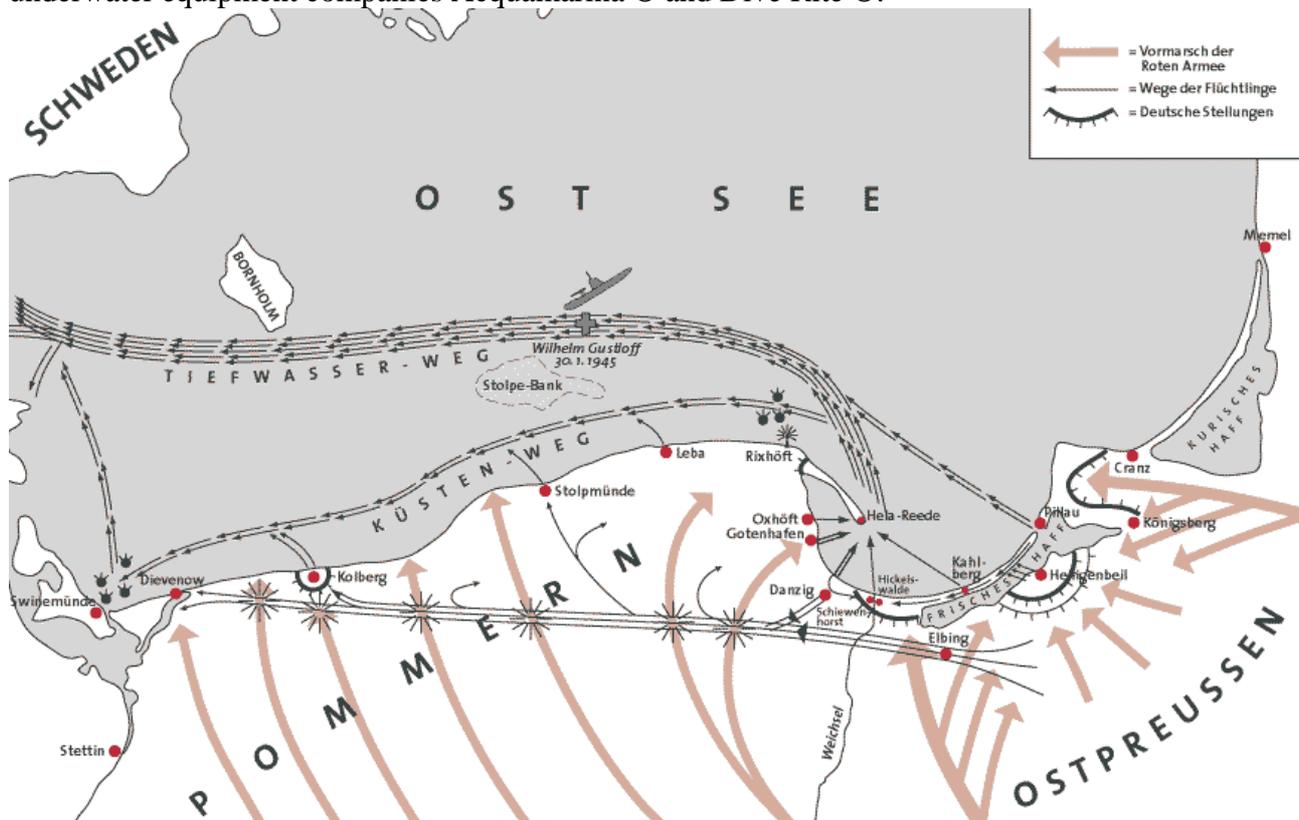
Early in 1945 the end of Nazi Germany was clearly taking shape, the Red Army advanced into East Prussia committing massacres that terrified the civil population; Admiral Karl Doenitz organised the Hannibal Operation, the mass evacuation of the German population from those territories: about three million people then fled to the west looking for safety. At 12,30 p.m. on 30 January 1945 the cruise liner Wilhelm Gustloff sailed from Gotenhafen-Oxhoeft (today's Gdynia) harbour, near by Dantzig (Gdansk), overcrowded from refugees, most women, children and old people. During the chaos about eleven thousand people boarded a ship which was only built for less than two thousand passengers.



Once on board the people felt a false sense of security, as little did they know, that whilst leaving the harbour, the Gustloff was intercepted and was being followed by the soviet submarine S-13 of Captain Alexandr Marinesko. At 9,10 p.m. the first of three torpedoes exploded on the port bow, after about fifty minutes the ship sank, with nearly all its passengers, into the ice-cold water of the Baltic Sea; only 996 survivors were rescued. So tragically finished the ship that was the flagship and the pride of KdF (Kraft durch Freude), the flag carrier of the Third Reich.

The wreck of the Wilhelm Gustloff is all that remains of the greatest tragedy at sea in history, it lies in the international waters off the coast of modern Poland, in the stretch of sea between the shallow basin of the Stolpe-Bank and the Danish island of Bornholm.

From July 4th till July 14th 2004, an official IANTD (International Association of Nitrox & Technical Divers) explored the wreck, and documented its condition. The project was planned and organised by the IANTD Training Facility Nautica MareDive team from Verona and supported by the IANTD Training Facility Acquamarina team from Marina di Pisa and by the technical underwater equipment companies Acquamarina ® and Dive Rite ®.



Eleven IANTD instructors and divers, skilful, not only in trimix and nitrox use, but also in u/w video shooting in adverse conditions, were on this huge historical shipwreck, in an underwater environment with restricted visibility, at 2.5 C° temperature and with unfavourable shipping forecast conditions.



For the first time nine Italian divers dove and explored the wreck of the ocean cruiser Wilhelm Gustloff, they were: Fabio Ruberti expedition leader, Massimiliano Canossa author and organiser of this expedition, Cesare Balzi safety advisor, Andrea Bolzoni photographer, Leonardo Belloni video operator, Nicola Boninsegna photographer, Diego Geraci video operator, Livio Loniti photographer, Massimiliano Rancan photographer; all divers used Acquamarina ® & Dive Rite ® diving



equipment which gave an excellent account of it-self in such extreme environmental conditions, video footage will be used in a documentary movie for the Italian TV to inform Italian public of this, the greatest sea disaster almost completely unknown in Italy. The team was completed by land cameraman

Alessandro Luria, and light sound technician Marina Billi.

Diving on a shipwreck like Wilhelm Gustloff is an exceptional event, not only because of its huge size (25.848 tons, more than 208m. length), but also for the great historical value and the enormous human tragedy that this wreck represents.



Fabio Ruberti



Marina di Pisa, 23 Luglio 2004