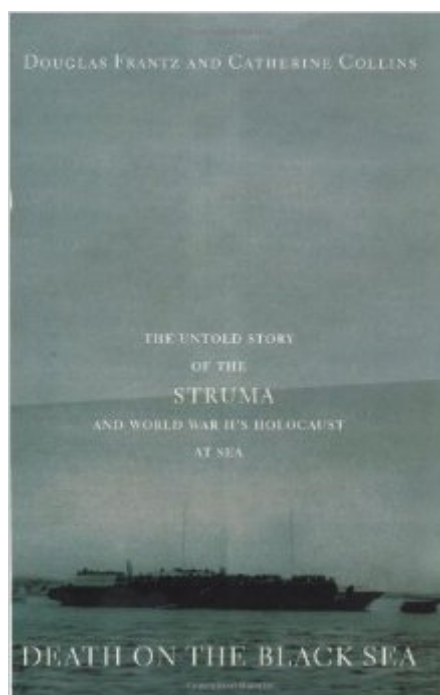


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# Death On The Black Sea: The Untold Story Of The 'Struma' And World War II's Holocaust At Sea



## Synopsis

On the morning of February 24, 1942, on the Black Sea near Istanbul, an explosion ripped through a ship filled with Jewish refugees. One man clung fiercely to a piece of deck, fighting to survive. Nearly eight hundred others -- among them, more than one hundred children -- perished. From this dramatic prologue *Death on the Black Sea* unfolds as a powerful story of endurance and the struggle for survival aboard a decrepit former cattle barge called *Struma*. The only path to escape led through Istanbul, where the desperate passengers found themselves trapped in a closing vise between the Nazis and countries that refused them sanctuary. The story of the *Struma*, its passengers, and the events that led to its destruction is investigated and revealed fully in two vivid, parallel accounts set six decades apart. One chronicles the diplomatic maneuvers and callousness of Great Britain, Romania, Turkey, and the rest of the international community, which resulted in the largest maritime loss of civilian life during World War II. The other part of the story recounts a recent attempt by a team of divers to locate the *Struma* at the bottom of the Black Sea, an effort initiated and pursued by the grandson of two of the victims. A vivid reconstruction of a grim exodus aboard a doomed ship, *Death on the Black Sea* illuminates a forgotten episode of World War II and pays tribute to the heroes, past and present, who keep its memory alive.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There are countless stories of the Holocaust that can never be told because those who experienced them were lost in the mad destructive fury. The story of the doomed ship *Struma* might be one of those stories, except that one of the nearly 800 people on board survived the sinking of the vessel.

Death on the Black Sea: The Untold Story of the Struma and World War II's Holocaust at Sea (Ecco) by Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, is not just a survivor's story, but a full accounting of a shameful atrocity that has been largely overlooked, even in histories of that bleak time. The history begins with an account of pre-war Romanian history, and the brutalities that occurred even before the country joined the Nazis. Only the desperate would have paid the shamefully exorbitant cost for passage on the leaky, filthy cattle boat Struma, with the hope of getting to Palestine. The British controlled such immigration, however, and restricted it so as not to bother the Arabs and their oil supplies. The ship left Romania in December 1941, with intent to sail out of the Black Sea, through the Bosphorus Strait, and on to Palestine. The engine failed on the first day, was patched, and failed three days later. The ship was towed by a Turkish tug to Istanbul harbor. There the ship stayed for almost two months, while bureaucratic nonsense was conducted to seal the fate of the passengers. They slowly withered due to disease and lack of fresh food and fresh air. There was even bickering over a plan to let the children leave the ship, a plan that never happened because Turkey, following a suggestion from the British, cut the anchor of the engineless vessel and simply set it adrift. Stalin had ordered Russian submarines to sink all ships in the Black Sea to prevent them from getting to Germany.

Many events that took place in WWII will never be known. Many people who had experienced and witnessed horrific events, during the Holocaust, perished. Anti-Semitism was rampant in Romania before the war and intensified in November 1941 when the Romania, under Ion Antonescu, joined the Axis Powers (Germany, Japan & Italy). About 400,000 Jews were murdered in Romania during the Holocaust. One extreme example (p24) 200 Jewish men and women were taken, by the Romanian Legionnaires to an abattoir where they were stripped naked, driven up to the slaughterhouse, beheaded and hung on iron hooks along the wall. In December 1941, nearly eight hundred Romanian Jews attempted to escape to Palestine. They rented, from a Greek named Pandelis, for extortionate prices a wooden wreck vessel of dubious seaworthiness, named Struma. Due the engine problems the Struma had to anchor at the harbor of Istanbul, Turkey where it was quarantined by Turkish authorities for ten weeks. In 1938, the government of Turkey, under Ataturk adopted a measure that forbade transit through Turkey, a law clearly aimed at the Jews fleeing Germany and other countries in Europe. Britain, that at that time ruled Palestine, refused to let Struma's passengers to land in Palestine, and encouraged the Turks to send Struma back to the Black Sea. The Turkish Government ordered the ship to be towed back to the Black Sea, where she would doubtless be cast adrift outside Turkish territorial waters. Eventually it went down after an

explosion. All drowned except David Stoliar who close to drowning was miraculously picked up by a paddling man. The loss of Struma was the largest naval civilian disaster in WWII.

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