

# The Sinking of the SS Edmund Fitzgerald

## Sample Essay

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The SS Edmund Fitzgerald was a one of the best known cargo ships that sailed the Great Lakes during the second half of the 20th century. She broke many sailing records and was considered to be one of the fastest ships of her time. But even greater than the ship herself, was the great mystery surrounding the demise of this immense sailing vessel of the Gitche Gumee.

The construction of the SS Edmund Fitzgerald began in 1957 by the Great Lakes Engineering works. She was christened on June 8, 1958 and made her maiden voyage on September 24, 1958. At 729 feet long, 39 feet high, and 75 feet wide, the 'Fitz', as it was nicknamed, was one of the largest cargo ships to sail the Great Lakes during its time.

The SS Edmund Fitzgerald was commanded by Captain Ernest M. McSorley, a seasoned sailor who was both respected and admired by his crew. The ship was manned by 29 people, and included cooks, cleaners, and people who loaded and cared for the cargo. John McCarthy was the first mate of the 'Fitz' and good friend of Captain McSorley. They had sailed together for many years. McCarthy was seen by his crew as a fair and even-handed boss.

On the November 10, 1975 while headed from Duluth, Minnesota to Detroit, Michigan carrying a heavy load of iron ore, the SS Edmund Fitzgerald was caught in a

violent storm. For hours the great ship battled 30 foot waves. Following closely behind her, was the SS Arthur M. Anderson, another slightly smaller cargo ship. The Captain of the Arthur Anderson, Jesse B. Cooper, maintained radio contact with Captain McSorley all during the storm.

At around 6:00 in the evening things took a turn for the worst. Captain McSorley radioed Captain Cooper and told him the Fitzgerald was taking on water and tilting to one side. They agreed that the Fitzgerald would slow down and allow the Anderson to catch up with her. By the time the Arthur M. Anderson reached the location of the Edmund Fitzgerald, she was nowhere to be found. The ship went down with all 29 crew members aboard.

There are several theories as to why this great ship sunk. One theory was that the ship was engulfed by a huge wave which pushed the front of the ship underwater. It is speculated that it then hit the ground and broke in two. Another possible theory was that the waves lifted both ends of the ship (bow and stern) leaving the centre unsupported. The force of the overloaded iron ore cargo then pushed down on the middle, breaking it in two and sinking it.

The SS Edmund Fitzgerald now lies 530 feet underwater 17 miles from Whitefish Point, Michigan. The bell of the 'Fitz' was raised in 1995, restored, and placed in The Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum in Michigan. Another bell, with all the names of the crew members who lost their lives in the tragedy was placed with the wreck.

The mystery of the SS Edmund Fitzgerald will never be completely solved, but her crew will always be remembered for their dedication and bravery.