At the time of her launch on December 15, 1934, Grille at 443-feet overall, was the largest yacht afloat. The Aviso is generally a dispatch or intelligence ship and in spite of being built (at a cost equivalent to more than a million pounds, raised partly by public subscription) as Germany's equivalent of a royal yacht, she was equipped with three 12.7cm cannon, six anti-aircraft guns, two machine guns, and the capacity for carrying 280 mines. Her first appearance as a state yacht was on May 30, 1936 for a fleet parade to commemorate the Battle of Skagerrak. Then Hitler and his War Minister, Field Marshal von Blomberg, went on a short cruise to Reykjavik. In fact the Führer spent most of his time on board being seasick. The following year she carried the German delegation, led by von Blomberg, to England for the coronation of King George VI on May 12 and to observe the Royal Navy's Spithead Review which started gathering in the Solent, near Portsmouth, the following day.

...[During the war] On the Führer's orders the ship had not been camouflaged for war, but had retained her distinctive yellow funnel and white hull with gold paint on the bow and stern. He
referred to the ship as "The White Swan of the Baltic". But Grille, in the interim between state visits, had nevertheless switched roles from royal yacht to warship.

When Hitler's army invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, he sent a message ordering that 'his' ship be prepared for combat. Mine-laying equipment was fitted along the decks and the mines themselves loaded at Wilhelmshaven. In the evening of September 3, and for six nights afterwards, Grille, with a destroyer squadron for protection, laid mines in the North Sea.

... Back in Kiel, Grille took on more ammunition and mines in preparation for the occupation of Norway. Hitler had decreed that his 'own' ship should lead the invasion, and the fleet sailed up the Danish coast with Grille in the van. En route, ... [the Grille] rammed a Danish freighter.... Grille had been holed by the collision and was shipping water, so had to return to Kiel for repairs, thus being denied the glory of leading the assault on Norway.

In July 1940 a couple of weeks after the fall of France, the German Navy began plans for Operation Seelöwe (Sealion), the invasion of England along a 275-mile front from Ramsgate to Portland.

STAGE ONE of the plan was to overwhelm the British fleet in the North Sea and English Channel, followed by the occupation of the southern counties of England.

STAGE TWO was for Hitler's triumphant arrival in the Port of London on board a suitably royal yacht, the Aviso Grille, to receive Britain's surrender at Whitehall.

STAGE THREE of the journey was for the Führer to travel along the river Thames on board one of Grille's three pinnaces, Motorboot 1 later to become known as Grillet.

After the victorious arrival in London, Hitler was to proceed without delay by motor boat to Windsor Castle, already earmarked as his 'London home'. In preparation for the conqueror's voyage of victory, Grille, with Grillet on board, had been moved from the Baltic to Belgium and made ready in Ostend.

Hitler's battle plan, from conception to fulfillment, allowed for 80 days preparation (as a comparison, the D-day landings took two years to organize). The invasion envisaged the use of ten infantry regiments, 170 cargo ships, 1,277 Rhine barges, and 471 tugs, which were all gathered alongside Grille in Ostend. Even allowing for the fact that the barges could not operate in anything other than a dead-calm sea, and could be overturned by the mere wash of a Royal Navy warship, it was impossible for mobilization on such a scale to escape the notice of the RAF. The operation has been described as "perhaps the most flawed plan in the history of modern warfare". Sea Lion was called off. Hitler then switched his sights towards the Soviet Union and Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia, with Grille again leading the mine-laying maneuvers. Thereafter, Grille enjoyed a relatively peaceful war.

In 1942 she was painted wartime gray and used as the staff ship and operational headquarters for Grand Admiral Erich Räder, C-in-C of the Navy, based mainly at Narvik. The Battle of the Arctic was controlled from her dining room. When Räder was replaced by Karl Dönitz Grille became command ship of the U-boat fleet.
On May 1, 1945 Grand-Admiral Dönitz was ferried by Grillett to Grille and there on the foredeck he announced the death of Hitler. It is recorded in the ship's log "that he, acting on the Führer’s orders, had assumed leadership of the German nation and supreme command of the fighting forces."

The last German entry in the log was: “May 2-4: Flag at half-mast in memory of the hero’s death of our Führer”. A few days later Grille, by now with patches of rust showing on her gray hull and with only one working boiler (the engines were reported to have been sabotaged), sailed from Trondheim. With her German crew commanded by British officers, she anchored in the Forth at Rosyth a prize of war. Too big to stay in a busy port, she was then towed to the grimy and far less dignified coal dock at Hartlepool, County Durham, and, a year later, offered for sale to the highest bidder. There was no reserve price, but the Treasury was reported to be hoping to achieve a figure between GBP 70,000 and GBP 100,000, which it considered “cheap at the price.”

In August 1946 the Admiralty announced that a buyer, a Canadian ship owner and financier living in Byfleet, Surrey, had paid about GBP 125,000 for her and planned to sail her around the world promoting British exports. Two years later the ship was again offered for sale, now with an asking price of GBP 400,000, and eventually bought by Mr. George Arida, a Lebanese textile manufacturer, for a reported price of GBP 357,000. Mr. Arida who, during the war, had provided the material for tropical uniforms for British troops and also personally paid for the construction of an RAF Spitfire, was secretly representing King Farouk of Egypt, who did not want to be publicly associated with the purchase of "Hitler’s yacht.” En route to Beirut, with a senior Blohm & Voss engineer on board, saltwater was discovered in the cooling system, and Grille had to put in to Malta for repair.

In Beirut, anti-Farouk terrorists attached two limpet mines to her hull, causing only minor damage. But the king suddenly lost interest in his purchase, leaving Mr. Arida, who loathed the sea, stuck with both the ship and the bill; Grille was steamed to New York, where Mr. Arida hoped to find someone interested in converting her into a luxury cruise ship or floating casino and she briefly again became a tourist attraction at a dollar a time on a berth described as "near Wall Street.” But, with her berth costing GBP 250.00 a day, she had become what Mr. Arida described as "an expensive toy.”

In April 1951, four years after he had bought her, he sold Grille for scrap for GBP 35,000 less than one tenth of what he had paid and the vessel was towed to a yard on the Delaware river to be broken up and the metal recovered from her used in America’s defense program.

(*) רבי ברקר הוא עיתונאי בריטי לשעבר המתגורר היום />'גרילה' ומושב חורף שלו בבריטניה. ההתחזות של סירתו של גרילה ושל "גרילה" מובאת - עוד בעילה שלא הסירה Grillet.