



USS LST-331

Builder: Philadelphia Navy Yard, Philadelphia.

Commissioned: 11 March 1943

Decommissioned: 20 November 1944

Disposition: Transferred to the Royal Navy.

Length: 327' 9" oa

Beam: 50'

Draft: 1' 6" bow, 7' 5" stern (unloaded); 8' 2" bow, 14' 1" stern (loaded -- at sea);
3' 1" bow, 9' 6" (loaded -- beaching)

Displacement: 1,625 (light); 4,080 (w/ full load of 2,100 tons)

Propulsion: 2 x General Motors 12-567 diesels, twin shafts/rudders

Range: 24,000 nm @ 9 knots

Top Speed: 11.6 knots

Complement: 111

Troops: 163

Armament: 7 x 40mm (single mount); 6 x 20 mm (single mount); 2 x .50-caliber
mgs; 4 x .30-caliber mgs

Commanding Officers:

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History:

USS LST-331
LST Flotilla 12, Group 35, Division 70

The USS *LST-331* was commissioned on 11 March 1943. (Reports of operations between date of commissioning and J8 July 1943, as well as names of commanding officer or officers are not available).

The *LST-331* departed from La Goulette, Tunisia at 0600 on 8 July 1943 (D+ two days) operating as flagship of Group 10, Flotilla 14, Task Force 86. The ship was loaded with Royal Air Force personnel, trucks and other vehicles together with 100 tons of ammunition, 2,140 tons of aviation gasoline and aviation equipment to be used in servicing aircraft on Comiso Airport, after its capture. At 1015 she entered the Tunisian war channel, 10 miles west of Zembria Island falling in astern of a convoy of LSTs. That evening the convoy proceeded for Gozo Island continuing on that course all that night and the following day, the size of the seas, on the beam, making it exceedingly rough going for LSTs and smaller craft. On the 9th at 1500 Gozo was sighted and and 1 1/2 hours later the course was changed for Sicily, running on dead reckoning. At 2300 on 9 July 1943, initial Transport Area One was reached and on the 10th at 0530 visual contact was established with a destroyer and the course verified, the *LST-331* arriving at her assigned area, being the first LST to arrive at 0700 on 10 July 1943. Ordered to anchor and await further orders, waves of small landing craft were observed proceeding shoreward and there was considerable gunfire from the destroyers and cruisers further out at sea, directed at shore installations still showing signs of resistance. A very heavy surf was running under a moderate wind and considerable skill was necessary to prevent broaching of small boats, a number of which lay abandoned on the beach.

At 1400 on the 10th the "331" was ordered to take two pontoons from alongside the Navy Tug USS *Nauset* (AT-89) in tow and beach them at a point five or six miles north west of the transport area. The lines to the pontoons parted in the heavy seas and they drifted toward the beach, finally drifting into the surf. A nearby LCT got a line fast and started towing them to deeper water. The lines parted several times and chains and links holding the pontoons together started breaking in the heavy swells. Finally towed into deep water the 331 made them secure and started back to the landing beach. The pontoons broke away again and after maneuvering in very shallow water a 7-inch hawser was finally made fast very close to the breakers and they were towed to the landing beach in an abating wind. Then the LST grounded at 0915 on the 11th and the pontoons surged forward and grounded in their proper location. The last vehicle was off at 1400 and finally the entire cargo was unloaded by the 12th.

Meanwhile enemy planes were overhead most of the time, being kept fairly high by anti-aircraft fire but general quarters was sounded on an average of once an hour. On the morning of the 11th an Axis medium bomber approached the 331's port quarter at 3,000 feet and dropped a stick of bombs 200 yards off the port

bow, under fire from the LST's guns. At twilight enemy planes were again dropping flares near the transports astern, the noon to seaward silhouetting the transports for planes approaching the island.

The LSTs were at right angles to the shore under high sand dunes and surprised several enemy pilots too intent on getting the transports. Holding her fire until two light bombers passed 100 feet above the water on the port side, the LST opened with all available guns and when last seen one bomber was on fire and losing altitude. Another plane flew past the starboard side at about 140 feet as all the LST's guns opened and sparks started flying from the plane as it crashed into the sea. Another approaching the bow at a 45 degree angle received 90% hits and burst into flames crashing ashore. On the 12th 14 enemy bombers were observed, two being brought down by nearby destroyers, one in flames and one smoking heavily. By 1830 all cargo was unloaded and the LST backed off the beach, anchoring for night off Scoglitti.

Loading shells and ammunition from the USS *Procyon* (AKA-2) on the 13th the LST proceeded to various beaches and at 1730 beached at an army ammunition dump a mile north of Scoglitti. At 2100 they were ordered to anchorage and minutes after clearing the beach a low flying plane approached and dropped 14 bombs in the water exactly where the LST had been beached. After another day of running from beach to beach the 331 finally discharged all her cargo and on the 15th at 1730 assumed guide for convoy of LSTs bound for Tunisia.

On 7 September 1943, *LST-331* departed Bizerte in convoy FSS-3 en route to the invasion of Salerno. On the 9th enemy aircraft attacked the convoy against heavy anti-aircraft fire. She entered the Bay of Salerno at 1200. Enemy aircraft dropped bombs on the beach, three shells from an enemy gun emplacement hitting nearby at 1430, as she shelled the area from which the shells came. At 1740 two Messerschmitt ME-109s came in low over the hills, one being immediately shot down. At 1800 the 331 made for the beach, as an air battle raged overhead. The first vehicle was off at 1830. The *LST-332* beached on the port side 50 feet away and *LST-376* to starboard, shell fire from the hills bursting in the air one mile distant. At 1930 the last vehicle was off and the 331 was heading for the anchorage. At 2130 flares dropped all around the harbor and 12 Junkers JU-88 medium bombers attacked, one being shot down. On the 10th general quarters at 0430 with planes heard but not seen, and flares dropping all around but bombs failing to hit any ship. At 0827 anchors aweigh out of the Bay of Salerno with our fighters circling overhead. At 1100 three dive bombers came out of the sun and one was shot down. At 1125 the 331 was underway out of the Bay of Salerno and entered Bizerte Harbor on 12 September 1943.

(Reports of movement between 12 September 1943 and 6 June 1944 are not available).

The *LST-331* took part in the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, but reports of her operations are not available. She was damaged by gunfire on 15 June 1944. On 20 November 1944 she was transferred to the Royal Navy. The British returned her to US Navy custody on 16 March 1946 and she was struck from the Naval Register on 26 March 1946. She was ultimately sold for scrap on 13 February 1948.

The *LST-331* earned four battle stars for her service during World War II.

Photographs:

None available.

Sources:

LST files, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

United States Coast Guard. *The Coast Guard At War. V. Transports and Escorts. Vol. 2.* Washington: Public Information Division, Historical Section, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, May 1, 1949, pp. 66-116.

United States Navy. *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships.* Volume VII. Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1981, pp. 574-742.

