



# USS LST-69

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Builder: Jeffersonville Boat and Machine Company, Jeffersonville, Indiana

Commissioned: 20 May 1943

Assigned to: LST Flotilla 13, Group 37, Division 73

Decommissioned: Totally destroyed by fire while in Pearl Harbor, 21 May 1944

Disposition: Total loss, stricken from the Navy Register on 18 July 1944

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

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

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## **Commanding Officers:**

LT Robert T. Leary, USCGR: 20 May 1943 - May 1944

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## History:

### **USS LST-69**

#### **LST Flotilla 13, Group 37, Division 73**

The Coast Guard-manned USS *LST-69* was laid down at Jeffersonville Boat and Machine Company at Jeffersonville, Indiana on 7 September 1942 and launched on 20 February 1943. She was sponsored by Mrs. S. F. Crum and was commissioned on 20 May 1943 under the command of LT Robert T. Leary, USCG. She was assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific theatre and participated in the Gilbert Islands operation in November and December of 1943.

The *LST-69* was at Funafuti on 4 April 1944 and arrived at Pearl Harbor on 6 April 1944. On 21 May 1944, she was still at Pearl Harbor, lying inboard of four LST's in a nest of eight such vessels at Tare 8, West Loch, Pearl Harbor. Having returned to Pearl Harbor in a broken down condition, she had no power available, her main engines having been secured on entering port so that repairs could be effected. The Commanding, Executive and Gunnery Officers were off the ship on various duties, but all other officers were aboard, including the Officer-of-the-Deck, who was alert and on deck. Also present were two thirds of the crew. Various watches were being stood. At about 1505 an explosion occurred on one of the outboard ships of the nest, the *LST-353*, where ammunition was being handled. This explosion brought all hands of *LST-69* on deck and they then reported to their moving stations to cut away the outboard ship. Repeated explosions followed and *LST-69* caught fire in several places. The original fire was brought under control, but the crew was unable to get all the mooring lines off and the ship to starboard would not drift clear. Fires again started on the deck and bridge deck and hoses were manned. There being no power aboard *LST-69*, a request was made of *LST-274*, in-board of *LST-69*, to tow the 69 clear, but all lines could not be severed to the outboard ship because of the fire's rapid spread and the repeated explosions.

As *LST-274* managed to break clear of the nest, the order to abandon ship was passed by word of mouth on *LST-69*, there being no other means available. The 69 was then aflame from the break in the foredeck to the deck house, the five-inch projectiles on the main hatch also being aflame and out of control. Earlier a clear-thinking signalman had doused the ammunition with a boat deck hose. As the fire and explosions carried from one ship to another, the gunnery department personnel had flooded magazines on the *LST-69*. There was no means of flooding the cargo ammunition and demolition outfits in the after end of the tank deck. When the men could no longer stand on deck, having been driven from their stations several times, many of them injured, and after the fire was beyond control, due to the intolerable heat, explosions and flaming high octane gasoline from the ship next outboard, all hands, who had not been blown clear or already driven off by fire, abandoned ship as an organized unit and went ashore by small

boat or by swimming. Here they were hospitalized or sent to Pier 11 for housing. The ship's log, bridge book and signal book were saved.

Many of *LST-69*'s crew were engrossed in the saving of life. Both the *LST-69*'s boats rescued men from the water and ferried them ashore, the boat crews continuing their rescue work in spite of being repeatedly blown down by explosions and hit by flying debris. None of *LST-69*'s crew were lost, though many were injured fighting fires on their own and adjacent ships. Two officers and 11 men were seriously injured and two officers and 25 men received minor injuries. Besides the ship's crew, about 200 Marines were on board *LST-69* at the time of the explosion and also a 13 man crew of naval reserve personnel for the *LCT-983*, which was lashed to the ship's main deck. Less than five minutes had elapsed from the first explosion until the *LST-69* was engulfed in flames. She was a total loss. Survivors of the seven vessels involved in the disaster were brought to the receiving ship where all Coast Guard personnel were collected and brought to the Captain of the Port barracks in Honolulu, put through the sick bay for examination for possible injuries, given showers and food, then issued clean bedding and clothes.

During the next week, all enlisted personnel were issued new outfits, records made up, new health records made, and pay accounts opened. The officers and crews of all vessels were mustered by the 5th Amphibious Force, at which muster the Coast Guard crew members were the only ones in complete uniform, rating badges on, and marched to the formation. The oldest men of the crew of *LST-69* were returned to the mainland for leave and reassignment. The *LST-69* was stricken from the Navy Register on 18 July 1944.

The USS *LST-69* earned one battle star for her service during World War II.

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The following is the account of her loss as written in the Coast Guard's official World War II history, *The Coast Guard at War, Volume VII: Lost Cutters*. Washington, DC: Historical Section, Public Information Division, U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, July 1, 1947, p. 21:

### **LST-69**

#### LST-69 BURNS IN SECOND PEARL HARBOR DISASTER

The Coast Guard manned *LST-69*, on 21 May, 1944, lay inboard of four other *LST*'s in a nest of eight such vessels at Tare 8, West Loch, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The ship, having returned to Pearl Harbor in a broken down condition, had no power available, her main

engines having been secured on entering port so that repairs could be effected. The Commanding, Executive and Gunnery officers were off ship on various duties but all other officers were a board, including the Officer-of-the-Deck, who was alert and on deck and two thirds of the crew. Various watches, including security and boat, signalman, messenger, roving and fire watches, were being stood. At about 1505 an explosion occurred on one of the outboard ships of the nest, the LST-353, where ammunition was being handled. This explosion brought all hands of the LST-69 on deck and they then reported to their mooring stations to cut away the outboard ship. Repeated explosions following and the LST-69 caught fire in several places. This original fire was brought under control, but the crew was unable to get all the mooring lines off and the ship to starboard would not drift clear. Fires again started on the deck and bridge deck and hoses were manned. There being no power on the LST-69, request was made of the LST-274, inbound of the LST-69, to tow the 69 clear, but all lines could not be severed to the outboard ship because of the fire's rapid spread and the repeated explosions.

### CREW ABANDONS VESSEL

As the LST-274 managed to break clear of the nest, the order to abandon ship was passed by word of mouth on the LST-69, there being no other means available. The 69 was then aflame from the break in the foredeck to the deck house, the five inch projectiles on the main hatch also being aflame and out of control. Earlier a clear-thinking signalman had doused the ammunition with a boat deck hose. As the fire and explosion carried from one ship to another, the gunnery department personnel had flooded magazines on the LST-69. There was no means of flooding the cargo ammunition and demolition outfits in the after end of the tank deck. When the men could no longer stand on deck, having been blown from their stations several times, many of them injured, and after the fire was beyond control due to intolerable heat, explosions and flaming high octane gasoline from the ship next outboard, all hands, who had not been blown clear or already driven off by fire, abandoned ship as an organized unit and went ashore by small boat or by swimming. Here they were hospitalized or sent to Pier 11 for housing. The ship's log, bridge book and signal book were saved.

### RESCUE WORK

Many of the LST-69s crew were engrossed in the saving of life. Both the LST-69's boats rescued men from the water and ferried them ashore, the boat crews continuing their rescue work in spite of being repeatedly blown down by explosions and hit by flying debris. None of the LST-69 crew was lost, though many were injured fighting fires on their own and adjacent ships. Two officers and 11 men were seriously injured and two officers and 25 men received minor injuries. Besides the ship's crew, about 200 Marines were on board the LST-69 at the time of the explosion and also a 13-man crew of naval reserve personnel for the LCT-983, which was lashed to the ship's main deck. Less than five minutes had elapsed from the first explosion until the LST-69 was engulfed in flames.



"IT'S NOT A SECRET ANY MORE: For the first time, LST's (Landing Ships, Tanks) are shown here with their huge, swinging doors wide open. After Sicily, Italy and the Aleutians, these yawning doors are no longer a surprise to the Axis. A Coast Guard officer in command of one of the giant landing craft took this picture, showing soldiers and Coast Guardsmen during unloading operations in the Aleutians."; no date; Photo No. 924435; photographer unknown.

The Coast Guard-manned LSTs 23 (background) and 69 (foreground).



"LST discharges supplies. . ."; no date (November, 1943?); Photo No. 3237; photographer unknown.

The Coast Guard-manned *LST-69* disembarks equipment during the Tarawa invasion.

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**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.

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