NAVY'S MYSTERIOUS WWII DISASTER AT WEST LOCH

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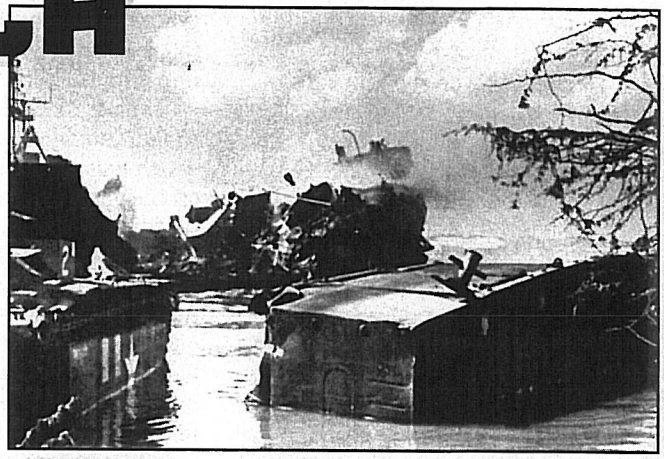
NAVY'S HUSHED-UP TRAGEDY AT WEST LOCH

A second major tragedy at Pearl Harbor became the Navy's best-kept wartime secret when powerful explosions wracked the amphibious staging area at West Loch, sinking six LSTs

BY A. ALAN OLIVER



The smoldering remains of the six LSTs lost in the West Loch fiasco were hidden from public view by virtue of the restricted area's ammunition depot being off-limits to civilians.

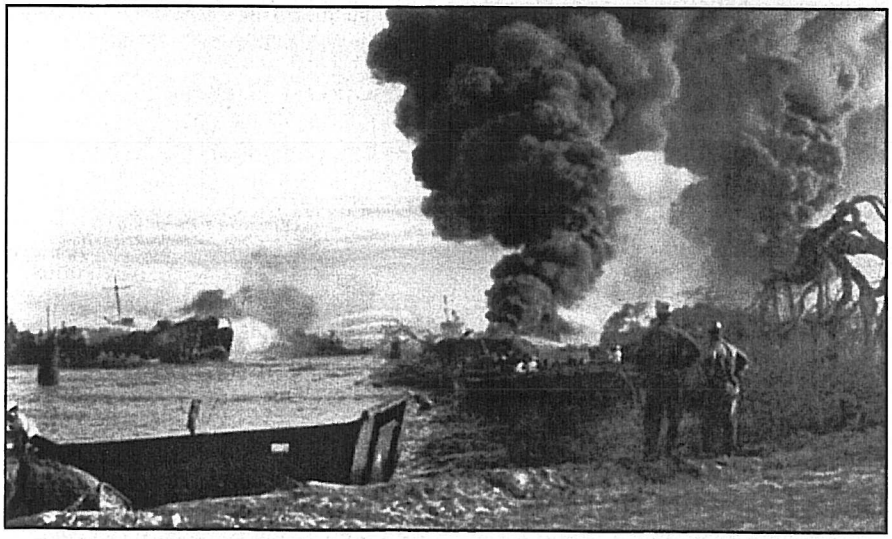
The day began as any other in wartime Hawaii with a gentle westerly breeze wafting across the sugar cane fields of the sun-basked Waipio Peninsula. Warmer than normal for mid-May, the usual parade of camouflaged warships steaming in and out of Waipio's teeming West Loch anchorage was absent on this quiet Sunday, 21 May 1944. Aboard the dozens of amphibious vessels crowded within this bustling anchorage, most soldiers, sailors and marines looked forward to a day of relaxation after a long week of endless drills, maneuvers and practice amphibious landings.

A busy staging area for the invasion fleets of the Pacific, West Loch was more than usually crowded as the Fleet prepared for one of the largest invasions yet — Operation *Forager* — the assault against Saipan in the distant Marianas.

Jamming this isolated haven adjacent to Pearl Harbor was a virtual armada of amphibious vessels of every description, size and purpose. Nested beam-to-beam at piers off of Hanaloa and Intrepid Points opposite Lualualei (now known as Naval Magazine Pearl Harbor) were six compact rows of LSTs and APDs moored at "Tare" piers jutting into the adjoining waters of West Loch and Walker Bay. Normally the scene of a scurrying variety of supporting service craft, fuel barges, tugs, and utility boats, this especially serene Sunday saw only a few plodding watercraft leisurely ferrying supplies and personnel to and from the Lualualei Naval Ammunition Depot to respective mother vessels.

Ringing West Loch's northern shore were 29 328-ft 1625-ton Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) tied up at six of the Tare berths, plus a variety of other amphibious vessels ranging from APD fast transports and tenders to 119-ft Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs). Several of the LCTs were already shackled in place aboard the LSTs' main decks, ready to be carried to the invasion zone where they would be launched by listing the LST sufficiently to allow them to slide into the sea. Each was slated to play a key role in Operation *Forager* as their bow doors and landing ramps opened to disgorge a rush of fully-equipped troops, vehicles and combat stores onto the enemy beach.

With the long anticipated *Forager* landings scheduled for mid-June, many of the LSTs had already been laboriously loaded with their full cargoes of lethal munitions, volatile fuels and combat equipment; a



Oily columns of black smoke rose thousands of feet in the air as exploding gasoline and ammunition leapfroged from one closely-nested LST to another. Admiral Nimitz claimed there wasn't sufficient space at Pearl Harbor to nest so many vessels in a safer manner. Although the cause of the disaster was never proven, it was believed a mishandled mortar shell or gasoline vapors was to blame. Sabotage was early ruled out.

veritable cornucopia of supplies vital to the forthcoming assault. Stored on many LSTs' forecastles were 80 to 100 55-gal drums of high-octane gasoline ready to be sped ashore to keep tanks and vehicles on the move once the fighting moved inland. Crammed within the LSTs' cavernous tank deck with its 92,765-cu-ft of storage area were tons of cargo and ammunition, much of it pre-loaded aboard amphibious vehicles known as DUKWs. Among their cargoes were mortar and artillery ammunition, grenades, rockets, flares, incendiary and armor-piercing shells, plus hundreds of thousands of rounds of .30- and .50-cal ammunition for Marine infantrymen. Interspersed between these vehicles on either the tank or main deck were trucks, artillery pieces, weapons carriers, jeeps, ambulances, command cars, bulldozers, field kitchens and tons of miscellaneous provisions required to keep a highly mobile invasion force in action until a beachhead was secured.

Pearl Harbor today still remains America's most-important Pacific Ocean Naval base. This aerial view shows the battleship *Missouri* at her permanent berth beside the USS *Arizona* memorial. (USN/J.T. Parker)

The *Arleigh Burke*-class guided missile destroyer USS C*hung Hoon* (DDG-93) passes Ford Island and the memorialized battleships *Missouri* (BB-63) and USS *Arizona* (BB-39). The 1944 explosion at nearby West Loch was heard in distant Honolulu, seen in the background.

In addition to combat stores for the Marines was the ship's own volatile cargo of 20mm, 40mm and small arms ammunition, 200,000-gals of diesel fuel, drums of lubricating oil, flares, signal rockets and fog oil smoke pots, much of it carried in main deck ready ammunition lockers, or stored dangerously exposed on the fantail. Manning the ponderous LSTs were Navy or Coast Guard crews of 120 men, including six or seven officers. Aboard to move the equipment ashore were Marine detachments of 200 men, mostly vehicle drivers and mechanics.

With *Forager's* D-Day growing inevitably nearer, tension mounted as the training became more intensified. For most of the young sailors and marines the upcoming invasion would be their first combat; a nervously awaited baptism of fire. Similarly, the crews of the LSTs were also largely fresh and untried. While most of these vessels had participated in previous landings, the rapid expansion of the amphibious fleet saw all too many crews unfortunately thinned by the many transfers of experienced hands to newly commissioned ships. Wartime casualties, leaves and normal crew rotations necessitated that youngsters fresh out of boot camp or specialist training be assigned to these veteran ships. It was the attempt to weld these new crewmen into tight knit teams that the accelerated training of the previous weeks had been addressed. And now — on the brink of another major invasion — young men soon to meet and better the hated enemy looked forward to a welcome day of relaxation.

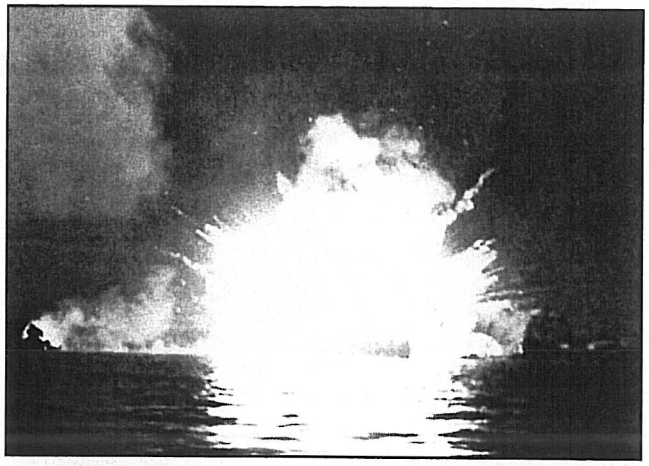
With the weekend, most of the ships had only half of their crews aboard; as many as possible having been granted liberty to enjoy a day or two on the town in Honolulu. Sailors not on duty or standing watch made the most of the relaxed Sunday schedule. Those ashore lounged in the Depot's recreational area playing cards, billiards, basketball, or writing letters home. Some swam from their ships, or sun-bathed at the local beach. Aboard ship, many "shot the breeze" in small friendly clusters while others read, joked, dozed, or quietly reflected on what lay ahead. Many a hangover was slept off while fitness-minded shipmates sought to deepen tans, sunning themselves on deck. Others thought of loved ones, wives, and sweethearts back in the "Good ole 48" as the occasional melodies of a wistful harmonica or guitar filled the air.

However, not every ship was quietly basking in the sun. Here and there the metallic sounds of jackhammers, drills and welding torches disturbed the relaxed mood to reveal work parties busily trying to make last-minute repairs. Roving teams of Navy riggers adjusted the restraining shackles anchoring an

LCT to the deck of *LST-205* while a Navy yard worker on overtime whistled away, making the most of an electrical repair to *LST-42's* main power panel. Deep within sweltering engine room of *LST-340,* crewmen struggled to repair a cantankerous generator. Aboard *LST-23* at Tare 9, a lone signalman tried to untangle knotted halyards. Busy within *LST-353*, a group of Army stevedores hurriedly unloaded 4.2-in mortar ammunition mistakenly placed aboard the wrong vessel. At Tare 7, where three flush-decked fast transports nested, technicians on the USS *Stringham* (APD-6) sweated over the troublesome circuitry of a malfunctioning radio. As the hours slowly passed in this idyllic tropical setting, the war in the far-off Central Pacific seemed remote and surreal; a distant nightmare not fully comprehended; not really happening.

A SECOND PEARL HARBOR?

At 1508 (3:08 pm), Lualualei's dreamy tranquility was shattered by a deafening explosion which thundered across most of Oahu. Without warning, an enormous mushroom of orange black fire encapsulated *LST-353* at Tare 8, obliterating it and most of the seven other ships from view as the giant fireball burst into the cloudless sky. Smashed flat were six shoreside wooden buildings at West Loch, another five blown into matchsticks. Windows shattered, broken glass flew. Nearby vehicles flipped on their sides. Shock waves toppled men on the opposite shore. Thrown like hapless rag dolls, victims aboard ships were blown a hundred feet into the air. In milliseconds, the entire bay seemed wreathed in oily plumes of thick black smoke billowing a thousand feet; the ground shuddering from the unexplained impact.



Ammunition explodes in a fireball as valiant fire-fighters fought the West Loch blaze all through the night. At the time, the massed amphibious fleet was practicing for the invasion of Saipan on Oahu's sandy beaches.

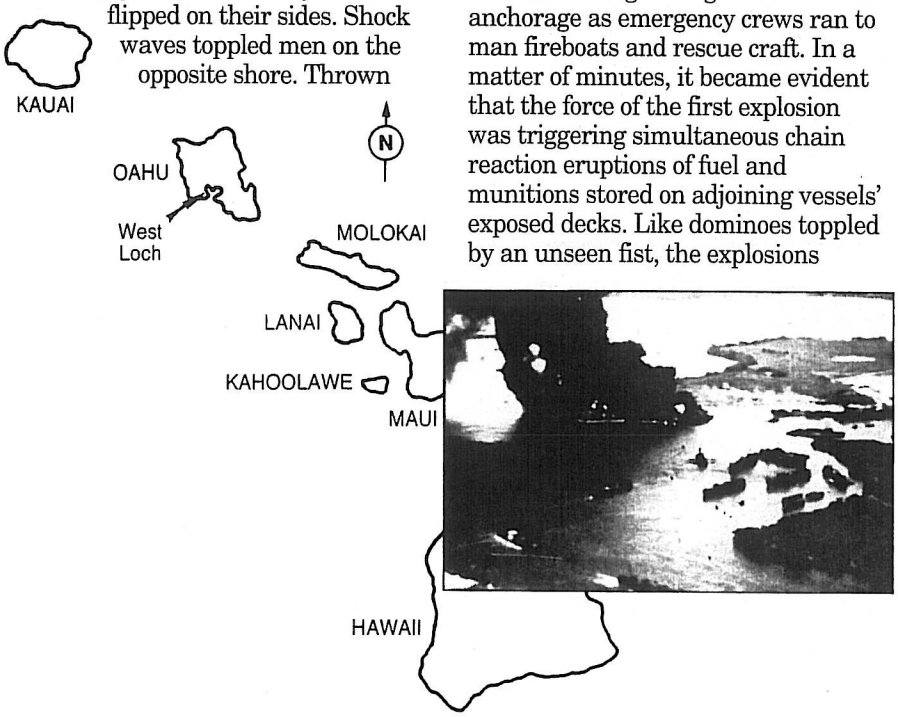
Miles away, at Adm. Nimitz' Pearl Harbor headquarters, the roar of the explosion sent duty officers running to phones to determine what had happened. Had the Japanese struck again — another sneak attack on Pearl Harbor? No one knew. Then the ground shook to a second blast. Earthquake? Volcano? Aerial bombs? Alarms rang as another shattering blast of even greater magnitude jolted the ether.

No sooner was it realized at Lualualei that the explosion had emanated from *LST-353*, tied up near the end of Tare 8, than a second, third and fourth detonation pierced the air, each more powerful than the one before, each sending blinding sheets of flame across the decks of the closely moored ships, snuffing out the lives of anyone directly exposed to their searing fury.

Alarms rang throughout the anchorage as emergency crews ran to man fireboats and rescue craft. In a matter of minutes, it became evident that the force of the first explosion was triggering simultaneous chain reaction eruptions of fuel and munitions stored on adjoining vessels' exposed decks. Like dominoes toppled by an unseen fist, the explosions flashed lightning-like from one ship to another as shocked and dazed crewmen tried to protect themselves from the rain of debris, shrapnel and body parts showering on them. In a matter of minutes, more than 200 men were in the water, most having been blown off their feet by the hammer-like power of the blasts. Swimming for the beach, those in the water had to push aside the mutilated bodies of shipmates instantly killed in the first detonations.

With deafening force, the machine gun-like staccato of explosions seemed to skip from ship to ship with mindless lethality, bypassing one LST, setting fires in another, blowing giant holes in the next, wreathing yet another in swirling flame as protective tarpaulins on the upper decks were set afire by the flaming debris. Soon adding to the terrible mayhem were thousands of rounds of tracer ammunition torched off by the heat into a spectacular display of fireworks. Sailors had no option but to dive overboard to escape the carnage, the flames, choking smoke and flying chards of steel. Others sought shelter from the rain of death by heading below decks, diving under vehicles, or anything offering sanctuary.

With chaos and destruction everywhere — shrapnel ripping into them from all sides — every ship had to fend for itself as the few officers or senior petty officers aboard the vessels desperately tried to rally dazed, stunned, injured and frightened shipmates to action. Discipline and reactions varied widely from ship to ship depending on who was giving the orders, and the state of their training. A few



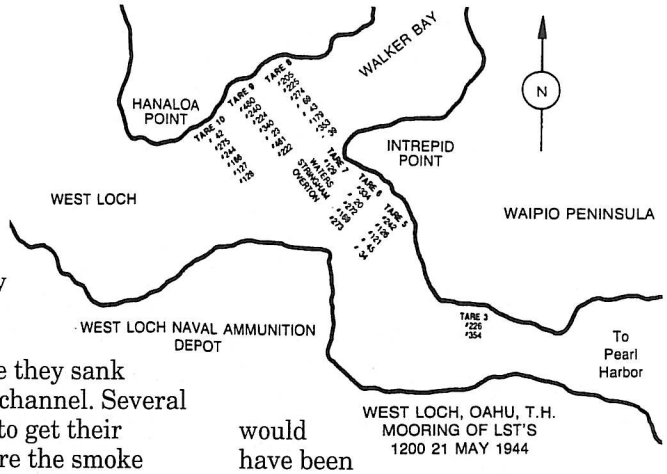
LSTs quickly managed to get fire hoses into action, attempting in vain to force back gasoline-fed flames. But the rapacious advance of the infernos created suffocating temperatures which forced fire-fighters to forego their efforts and abandon ship. Elsewhere in the stricken anchorage, some crews literally abandoned ship before the formal order could be given simply because there was no officer present who knew what to do under such horrifying circumstances. Yet, despite the confusion and mayhem, other vessels saw damage control parties hastily mustered, those on the ships farthest from Tare 8 having the best success because of the less intense heat.

Hulls buffeted by the unrelenting force of the explosions, several of the hapless ships nearest *LST-353* at Tare 8 began to take on water and sink; their hollow ferryboat-type interiors unable to stem the inrush of seas pouring through cracked seams and man-sized holes. Unable to move, abandoned, sinking, one after the other of the Tare 8 LSTs began to disappear in the smokey maelstrom rising from the fire blackened anchorage.

FIREMEN TO THE RESCUE

Within an hour of the first explosion, V/Adm. R. Kelly Turner, USN, commander of Adm. Spruance's amphibious force, was himself aboard a small launch personally helping direct the mounting rescue effort. And help came not a moment too soon as men fighting to save their lives were pulled from the waters by eager shipmates, many horribly burned. Everywhere, the charred bodies of floating corpses attested to the intensity of the explosions and resulting conflagrations. Making matters worse, seeping oil from sinking ships began to spread across the water to ignite LSTs at distant Tares which were not otherwise damaged or threatened. Like a giant mewing cyclops, the fire and destruction continued to spread in defiance of the assistance being given by anything that could float or lend a hand.

Yet, despite the total confusion, swirling smoke, and horror of the calamity, a few of the LSTs mustered enough crewmen to slip their lines and make a dash to safety from the searing holocaust. Some were aided by rescue tugs; others made it on their own. Still others — ablaze from bow to stern and totally abandoned — now drifted free of their moorings only to run aground or become menaces to other vessels before they sank or capsized in mid-channel. Several LSTs were unable to get their diesels on line before the smoke asphyxiated the men. Trapped, hapless bluejackets could only make the best of it struggling to keep their vessels afloat via bucket brigades, or whatever means could be mustered.



HELP ARRIVES FROM PEARL

With assistance arriving from Pearl Harbor in the form of rescue tugs and salvage ships equipped with gasoline smothering foam or chemical fire-fighting gear, the see-sawing battle against the flames slowly began to be won. Yet, despite the massive rescue effort, explosions and fires continued to ravage the scattered ships well past sundown; the last occurring aboard blistered and sinking *LST-39* at 2230.

As a mile-long phalanx of ambulances raced from Honolulu and Pearl Harbor bringing doctors, nurses and emergency aid, the awesome toll of the tragedy became apparent. Lying under tarps or blankets were the bodies of 392 dead; 163 sailors, the rest young Marines from the newly formed 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions. Filling hastily rigged shoreside aid stations and the Depot's small sickbay were nearly 400 seriously injured men suffering from burns, shock, broken bones and shrapnel wounds. Another 86 walking wounded were treated and released for duty. In the confusion, casualties to Army personnel unfortunately were not recorded.

With the dawn of a new day, the full loss became evident. In fire-ravaged West Loch, six LSTs had sunk, two of them carrying already loaded LCTs. Four LSTs were so seriously damaged they could not be repaired in time to participate in the forthcoming invasion. Two had gone aground and five others were superficially damaged but still fit for duty. Tragic as it was, casualties would have been much higher if the LSTs had been fully manned, or had not most of the Marines already departed aboard transports headed for the Marianas.

WHO WAS TO BLAME?: THE INQUIRY BEGINS

With the death toll and casualties still mounting, the unexplained nature of the explosions caused the Navy to clamp an immediate and complete blackout on the incident. No word was leaked to the press; a TOP SECRET stamp affixed to the official inquiry. Survivors and eyewitnesses to the calamity were warned under threat of prosecution not to make any mention of the disaster in letters or calls to family members. To the outside world the tragedy at West Loch simply never happened.

Although first reactions within the military hierarchy considered some form of Japanese submarine attack as the possible cause, the depth of West Loch's waters, anti-submarine nets and West Loch's convoluted entry-way soon dismissed this theory as impractical. Yet despite the lid of total secrecy, rumors and gossip ran rampant among eyewitnesses in the quest to determine what had actually happened. Was it sabotage? Had B-17 Army bombers mistakenly dropped bombs on West Loch? Did blame lay with overworked Army stevedores who became careless, or over fatigued in the mid-day heat? Or, may it have been a case of a sailor's grudging revenge against a hated shipmate gone awry? No one knew.

Wasting no time, a Naval Board of Inquiry was mustered at the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard the next morning. Convening behind closed doors at 0900 hours, R/Adm. John F. Safroth sat in charge of the six member panel as it began to hear the tales of a string of witnesses called to testify.

(continued on page 36)

TRAGEDY AT WEST LOCH

(continued from 29)

First to speak was injured Lt. (jg) R.W. Thomas, USNR, executive officer of *LST-353*, the vessel upon which the first explosion was thought to have occurred. One eardrum painfully broken by the blast, Thomas clearly still suffered great discomfort as he proceeded with his invaluable testimony. Somberly, Thomas reported that he and the captain were on the LST's bridge observing *LST-179* attempting to leave its berth beside them outboard of Tare 8. The explosion injured both officers, knocking them down; the ship immediately wreathed in raging flames and plumes of thick smoke. Staggering to their feet, the captain rushed over to adjacent *LST-39* on the opposite side, hoping to muster a firefighting effort. He found none and realized that vessel was drifting away, its lines severed from the bollards. Meanwhile, Thomas found three enlisted men huddled on *LST-353's* fantail.

When asked about events preceding the explosion, Thomas testified that Army personnel were unloading mortar ammunition from the LCT already shackled aboard *LST-353*. A truck was standing by on the elevator at the main deck level ready to shift the ammunition to a waiting 50-ft LCM for shipment back to the Depot magazine. The Court's next question raised eyebrows when Thomas readily admitted that 80 drums of high-octane fuel were stored on deck 15-ft from the LST's elevator. Asked if this seemingly dangerous practice was unusual, Thomas replied that most LSTs were forced to be loaded in this manner because of space restrictions. When queried if he actually witnessed the first explosion, Thomas declared he was facing aft with his back to the detonation on the bow when it occurred a few minutes later. Testimony completed, a still wobbly Thomas was thanked and dismissed.

The next witness, Navy coxswain Robert F. Sullivan, USNR, testified that he was at the protected helm of the 50-ft LCM which had carried the truck unloading the LCT aboard *LST-353*. His LCM was about 75-ft away from the LST's lowered bow ramp when the explosion occurred well forward on *LST-353's* upper deck. The force of the bright crimson blast went up and over the bobbing LCM; its shock wave smashing the tiny craft, but otherwise doing only minor damage. Swinging the LCM's bow around, Sullivan departed the area as the second and third explosions detonated behind him.

The third eyewitness offered a crucial and highly critical report to the Court. He was L/Cmdr. Joseph B. Hoyt, USNR, Commander of LST Group 39, Flotilla 13. In his cabin aboard flotilla flagship *LST-225* — second innermost of the vessels moored at Tare 8 — Hoyt reported that he had difficulty leaving the wheelhouse because its door was jammed by the impact of the first explosion. When Hoyt finally reached the conning station via exterior ladders, he found a storm of fiery debris raining down on the ship; fires already broken out on *LST-225's* decks as well as on the LSTs adjoining it. The signal blinker's light and lens had been blown out, and all antennas torn away leaving no way for Hoyt to communicate with anyone, except by waving his arms. Through the smoke he saw men running everywhere, observing some of *LST-225's* crewmen attempt to rig hoses to knock down the dozens of small fires already torching its decks. Realizing they needed foam or chemicals to fight gasoline-fed flames, the men abandoned the hoses and disappeared in the swirling smoke.

A second explosion sent Hoyt sprawling, knocking him senseless for several minutes. When he came to, Hoyt somehow had stumbled across *LST-39* and through the passageway of *LST-43*, noting that his steel helmet had been blown off. Still dazed, he moved among the men valiantly trying to fight the fires, but had difficulty recalling the exact order of events amid the chaos of the continuing explosions, which now included detonations of the Marine's .30-cal ammunition and phosphorus shells.

More than a dozen LSTs and LCTs were lost or damaged in the blast that took 163 lives; injuring 396 others. Many Marines were among the casualties. Fire-fighters did their best to fight the gasoline-fed flames with water until more-effective chemical foam arrived from nearby Pearl Harbor.

"...PANICKED SAILORS ABANDONED SHIP PREMATURELY"

Trying to gain some semblance of order as he made his way through the scorching Dante-like infernos, Hoyt noticed that *LST-224* had managed to free itself and get underway, soon followed by *LST-274* and *LST-205* whose fires had been knocked down by the skilled handling of a fireboat which managed to force its stubby bow between them. Returning to *LST-225*, Hoyt now realized it had been virtually abandoned, but managed to get the fire boats to turn their hoses on its blazing deck, thereby saving both it and adjoining *LST-205*. By then, Hoyt claimed that now abandoned *LST-39* had drifted down to Tare 9 out of control, its raging wind-driven fires also setting *LST-480* aflame as it crossed its bow. Already sunk was *LST-353*, with three of the middle vessels at Tare 8 — blazing LSTs *-179*, *-43* and *-69* — also haplessly drifting in the stiff afternoon breeze into the remaining vessels moored at Tare 9. The swift intervention of several fearless tugs managed to move the drifting ships out of harm's way; avoiding further damage at Tare 9.

Concluding his testimony, Hoyt was extremely critical of those crews which, in his opinion, prematurely abandoned ship, or who in their panic made insufficient efforts to save their vessels. As proof of his contention, Hoyt cited the exemplary actions of *LST-274* which was raked by more fires and damage than any other ship yet who managed to survive the maelstrom because of the crew's dedication to

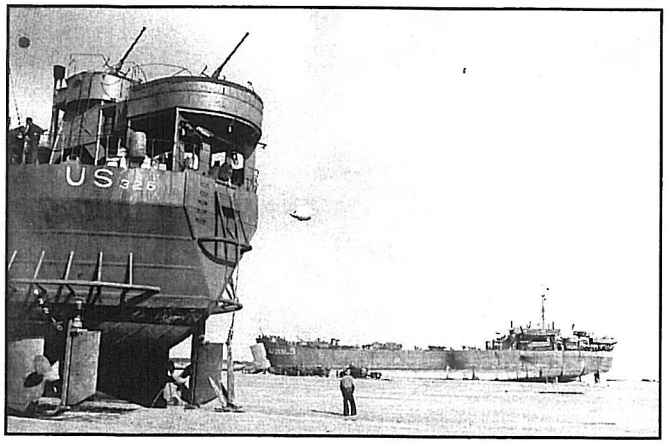
keep their stricken vessel afloat long enough to allow it to beach at Walker Bay along with his abandoned flagship, *LST-225*.

Before Hoyt's testimony concluded, the Court established several factors which in the final analysis proved to be key causes of the tragedy. The Court found that pre-loading of the ships with such dangerous cargoes could not be avoided in wartime. There simply was no other way or manner to store the necessary items aboard amphibious vessels packed to their limits with required ordnance and fuels. Gasoline was volatile regardless of where or how it was stored, as were explosive munitions. Under combat conditions, the Court was advised it was often necessary to compromise certain elements of safety. In the Court's findings, the same logic was applied to the crowded nesting of the ships at West Loch. Jammed as they were by virtue of the pre-invasion buildup, that was the only way the ships could be moored. In that regard, it was noted the bollards on the piers were of insufficient size and strength to keep the weight of the ships from breaking loose in the aftermath of the explosions. After a week of detailed testimony and cross examination by Judge Advocate Capt. Elmer Tarbutton, USN, the Court recommended in its carefully drawn deliberations that LSTs no longer be nested in order to avoid future disasters of this nature. However, in his later review of the Court's findings, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz took great exception to their resolutions saying: "...facilities at Pearl Harbor were too limited and that nesting was absolutely necessary." To that statement, Nimitz adamantly added, "Such practices are a calculated risk that must be accepted [in wartime]."

NO ACT OF GOD?

Although a virtual legion of witnesses were called from every level of involvement including civilian dock workers, enlisted men, Army personnel and explosives experts, the exact cause of the explosion at West Loch was never really proven, even in subsequent reviews of the investigation. Two major causes emerged as most likely: Either a fused mortar round was accidently dropped while unloading the LCT aboard *LST-353*, or the initial explosion was caused by gasoline vapors. A plausible scenario could be established for either cause, especially when it was repeatedly pointed out in testimony that non-crewman were frequently reminded the smoking lamp was out due to the presence of the hazardous fuel.

Reviewing the Court's findings in a letter written 17 July 1944, Adm. Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the US Fleet, pulled no punches in his closing assessment that the disaster at West Loch was clearly "Not an act of God." However, no recommendations for courts martial nor career-ruining letters of reprimand resulted from the Pearl Harbor Inquiry. In reviewing the volumes of testimony by Naval and Coast Guard personnel (five of the 29 LSTs were USCG-manned), many errors and deficiencies were noted and several skippers were called to account for inadequate reactions to the emergency. However, the nerve-shattering shock of the explosions and the inability of most vessels to be able to quickly slip their lines under such torturous conditions was taken into account with instructions to revise and improve certain training regimens.



Flat-bottomed high-and-dry *LSTs -325* and *-388* seen at Normandy 12 June 1944. Six LSTs lost in the West Loch disaster three weeks earlier were identical sisters. Secrecy clamped on the West Loch fiasco was easily sustained by the headline grabbing invasions of Saipan in the Pacific, and Normandy in the Atlantic.

Despite L/Cmdr. Hoyt's critical assessment of some crew's behavior or possible misconduct, the Court mercifully made no recommendations for punitive or disciplinary actions.

In the Navy's divine wisdom, clamping a TOP SECRET status on the tragedy caused much evidence that might have been of importance to be lost because of the interval of time before the incident was declassified and made public in 1960 — 16-years after its occurrence. Combined with the fact that the larger issue of the successful execution of Operation *Forager* was only delayed one day by the West Loch fiasco served to ameliorate official interest in the disaster. With 1051 LSTs on its roster, it might appear that the US Navy considered these ocean-going ferries little better than expendable. In any event, LSTs quickly summoned from various other flotillas, plus the expeditious repair of the fire-damaged ships, allowed *Forager* to essentially come off as planned three weeks later.

Nevertheless, with the men and ships involved in the tragedy soon dispersed all over the world and the lid of secrecy assuring no further critical analysis by watchdogs or Washington, the events of that long-ago day continue to be shrouded in mystery more than 60-years later. Further erasing any evidence of the happening was the intense salvage effort which followed the incident. Within weeks of the disaster, all of the wrecks save one were removed. Well-applied coats of paint and reconstruction of damaged buildings and piers soon left no visible vestige of the billowing palls of oily black smoke which once rose high over secluded West Loch. That the site was restricted from civilian inspection further served to suppress prying eyes and investigations. These factors, the passage of time and nature's way of healing its blemishes leave the West Loch saga seldom mentioned in history books.

Today, all that remains of the day's horror is a portion of the skeletal bow of beached *LST-480* as it rusts in the tropical serenity of a forgotten Hawaiian backwater. This rotting relic and the fading memories of Navy veterans who survived that most-unexpected debacle are the only evidence the disaster ever happened. **SC**