



Adam Grohman Dives In Maritime History

By Bill Bleyer

Adam Grohman can't remember a time when he wasn't interested in history.

"When I was a little guy," the 30-year-old Locust Valley resident said, "my parents took me twice a year to Colonial Williamsburg." But his current fascination with maritime heritage didn't emerge until Grohman learned to scuba dive during a 2000 deployment in Southern California with the Coast Guard Reserve. That interest, so far, has produced four self-published books by Lulu Press (www.lulu.com/adamgrohman) on nautical and historical subjects, including two about Long Island.

Grohman's most recent effort is *Runner Aground, a History of the Schooner William T. Bell*. It's the curious tale of a rumrunning vessel that washed ashore in Bayville during Prohibition. It's the follow-up to last year's *Non Liqueur - the Bayville Submarine Mystery*. In that 139-page book, Grohman, whose day job is Director of Student Conduct and Community Education at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University, tried to get to the bottom of the legend that an old submarine was resting in the sand in Long Island Sound off the North Shore village.

After Sept. 11, Grohman was called up to active duty by the Coast Guard and ended up in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba for seven months. In his downtime, he did a lot of diving, and he and his buddy, Andy Campbell, created a maritime history research and preservation organization, the Underwater Historical Research Society (www.uhrs.org), whose dozen members help with research and diving.

His Coast Guard connection led to his first book, an historical novel titled *A Bright Shining Light* about a young Coast Guard officer in the beginning of World War II stationed in the Aleutian island chain in Alaska when the Japanese attacked. He and Campbell then wrote a diving guide for Guantánamo Bay.

When he got back from Cuba four years ago, Grohman was gung-ho to continue his diving. He learned about the possibility of one or more submarines

lying off the shore of Bayville in Long Island Sound by reading a guide to shore diving written by Daniel Berg of Baldwin. "It didn't make sense to me" that a submarine would be located along the Long Island shoreline, he said. So he began what would be three years of research. "It was kind of like diving on the North Shore of Long Island - it was sometimes very murky and feeling around in the silt for clues and facts."

"I learned a lot about historical research," he said. Besides making numerous dives on the site and bringing up remnants, he corresponded with museums and scoured microfilmed old newspapers in libraries. "I'm quite happy with the results in that I was able to determine that there were submarines there, in fact," he said. "My best guess is that there were three submarines scuttled there post-World War I," he added. "I believe they were N-class submarines that were sold by the Navy in 1922. There was a great influx of vessels used during the Great War and they were just selling the stuff off. The Navy a lot of times kept records of where they sold it, but once it got to that first seller, then the trail went cold."



Grohman believes the Bayville subs had been sold to the J.G. Hitner Iron Works of Philadelphia and then resold to create a breakwater for a ferry dock located at the end of Greenwich Street in Bayville, but the firm went out of business in the 1930's and Grohman was unable to locate its records. As to what remains in Bayville, Grohman said, "I believe that there are the remnants of one that rises above the bottom, and I believe there's another one, at least, under the current vil-

lage beach, which used to be a sand mine that was filled in." Grohman said what's on the bottom doesn't look like a sub. "What you see is more of the bottom curvature of the hull from the keel up," he said.


"The wreck of a barge that lies near the submarine apparently broke loose from the ferry pier and sank," he added.

While researching the submarines, Grohman began to come across references to the *William T. Bell*, a schooner carrying Prohibition booze that was blown ashore on Oak Point in Bayville in a nor'easter on Feb. 19, 1927. The six crewmen were saved by local residents and then disappeared before authorities arrived — belatedly because the locals and local bootleggers neglected to contact them while helping themselves to a lot of the illegal cargo. After several fruitless attempts to pull the vessel off the beach, the Coast Guard attempted to blow up the wreck, which had become a tourist attraction and nuisance, but photos show little damage was done except to the deck and rigging.

In doing research for his 156-page book, Grohman said he believes he has located some of the remains of the hull in shallow water off Oak Point. "The curvature of the frames and the placement of the frames would indicate an older vessel," he said. While a local weekly newspaper at the time reported it had been towed off the beach and relocated nearby, Grohman said, "We don't have any eyewitness reports of them moving it," and the wreck has never been found elsewhere. Thomas Alfano, director of the Bayville Museum, said of the two books that he "obtained a great deal of information. It's interesting."

Grohman already is looking ahead to his next two book projects. He is working with local divers who have located World War II-era aircraft that went down in Long Island Sound and are searching for two World War I submarine chasers reportedly sunk there. He is gathering information, as well, for a volume about Theodore Roosevelt, the first president to go down in a submarine, and his relationship with the U.S. Navy.

In the meantime, Grohman would like to excavate some of the wreckage of the submarines and the *Bell* to provide more information and preserve the remains for exhibition in a museum, if he could get the official clearances and underwriting. Otherwise, he said, "Eventually, it will decay and fall apart."



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