

# 69th annual Red Grant Regatta honors WWII sailor

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(Photo: Ed Pagliarini/Correspondent)

PERTH AMBOY – As a young man growing up in the city, Adolph “Red” Grant, loved the water.

He and his brother, Don, would regularly sail the Red Don with its No. 52 sail, a boat built by their father, Adolph “Doc” Grant, whose First Street home had a garage where 15 boats were built, including three Comets. Red Grant had sailed the boat to many victories in Raritan Bay.

A large framed photo of the Red Don sailboat her grandfather built hangs in the family room in Beverly Bolger’s Piscataway home as testament to her family’s ties to the Perth Amboy waterfront and the upcoming regatta that carries her uncle’s name.

Red Grant, a Navy sailor during World War II, died in 1945 at age 23 after the ship he was on was sunk by a Japanese submarine. His body was lost at sea in the Philippines. A headstone with his name is at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

Bolger said she and her family are honored that the regatta still has her uncle’s name.

“It carries on his memory, which kind of lessens the loss you experience,” said Bolger, residency program coordinator at JFK Medical Center in Edison, where she has worked since 1978.

## 69th annual Red Grant Regatta

This weekend is the Raritan Yacht Club’s 69th annual Red Grant Regatta along the Perth Amboy waterfront. About 70 boats are expected to participate in the event, which will benefit Easter Seals New Jersey, which provides employment training and occupational therapy for the disabled.

Al Rothschild, Red Grant Regatta co-chair, said his fiancée use to work for Easter Seals and she saw the work they do for the disabled by getting people into the workforce. He said representatives from Easter Seals are expected to assist with the regatta.

The Red Grant Regatta is one of the most popular sailboat racing events along the East Coast, according to Rothschild. A junior regatta, involving children on small sailboats, will be held on Friday, with the Mayor’s Cup race on Saturday and the final races on Sunday.

The Raritan Yacht Club, 160 Water St., Perth Amboy, is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Paul Zajac is chair of this year’s regatta.

Rothschild said there is a rivalry among the four yacht clubs around Raritan Bay — Raritan Bay Yacht Club, Keyport Yacht Club, Atlantic Highlands Yacht Club and Richmond County Yacht Club in Staten Island, New York.

“We think we’re the best racing club,” said Rothschild, adding that the club enjoys the challenge from the other clubs.

## The Grant family

Red Grant was one of six siblings who grew up in Perth Amboy. Bolger’s mother, Lillian Stevens, who died at age 82, and her aunt, Beatrice Pepe, who died at age 89 in 2006, were Grant’s sisters.

“It was quite a large family. My mom talked about him a lot,” said Bolger, who remembers taking her aunt to parades and Memorial Day events where she would sit with her hand on her heart.

“I knew what she was thinking of, her brother,” said Bolger, who has her uncle’s Purple Heart medal and her grandmother’s Gold Star, adding that her aunt would also try to get a bingo card with the number 52, because that was the number on her brother’s sail.

Bolger’s grandfather came to the U.S. as a young man on a boat from a coastal town in Italy. He was a steward on a ship.

“The manifest shows he and his brother came and he had \$7 in his pocket,” said Bolger, adding that her grandfather was about 15 or 16 years old at the time. She said the family name was Guerrato on the manifest and she thinks it was changed to Grant when they came through Ellis Island.

“I never saw my grandfather write Guerrato,” said Bolger, who remember her father dictating in Italian to send news to relatives in Italy.

Bolger believes her grandparents settled in Perth Amboy because her grandfather loved the water.

“My grandfather built sailboats in his home when he lived on First Street in Perth Amboy. We always went there to visit them. The whole bottom of the house was Grant’s Garage at one time,” Bolger said about the space her grandfather used to build sailboats and work on cars. She remembers seeing the shells of boats he was working on as she went upstairs to visit her grandmother, Gretchen Grant.

She said her grandfather was called Doc because he was considered an expert mechanic, a doctor of cars and boats. He had a car lift in the backyard.

The couple had seven children, the first of which died at 6 months old. The six surviving children included Beatrice, Lillian, Adolph (known as Red because of his thick red hair), Don, Peter and Victor. All four sons joined the military — Red, Don and Victor served in the Navy and Peter in the U.S. Air Force for 30 years before retiring. All of the siblings have died.

"Nobody knew him as Adolph. Every family member referred to him as Red. All his cards and letters, everything is Red," she said.

### **Growing up by the water**

"My grandmother didn't like the water as much. My grandfather was always down there and the kids were always down there. I never saw my grandmother swim. I never saw my Aunt Bea swim. My mother was an excellent swimmer," said Bolger, adding that her mother also sailed boats.

Bolger thinks Red Grant got involved in sailing because of his father, who had been a member of the Raritan Yacht Club since 1932. She said her grandfather was always tan from being out on the water.

In Red Grant's 1940 Perth Amboy High School yearbook, many people wrote about his skill as a sailor and his love for sailboat racing. His ambition was to become a sailor.

Red Grant entered the Navy after high school and wrote home to his family, including sending a photo of the USS Helena, his first ship.

Bolger said her uncle ended up being sent back to the states but was later returned to duty, perhaps after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

### **A Western Union telegram**

Among the items Bolger has detailing her family's history is the Department of the Navy Western Union telegram stating that her uncle, Red Grant, was reported missing in action.

The telegram reads "The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you that your son Adolph Narciso Grant, junior motor machinist mate first class is missing following action while in the service of his country. The Department appreciates your great anxiety but details are not now available. To prevent possible aid to our enemies please do not divulge the name of his ship or his station."

The telegram was sent by Vice Admiral Randall Jacobs, chief of naval personnel.

"That kind of gives me the chills to think that's what you received," Bolger said.

She said her grandfather reached out to sailing magazines, anyone he thought might know something.

Through articles and other information, the family learned that Red Grant was killed Feb. 11, 1945, on a landing craft sunk by a Japanese submarine in the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. He was 23. About 39 people were on the ship.

"It split the ship in half and some men did live," Bolger said. "What I heard from my family, my mom and my Aunt Bea, was that my uncle was in the engine room helping with the engine at the time when it sunk. He was so good with machines because my grandfather built cars."

"He gave his life at the age of 23. That's the ultimate sacrifice," Bolger said.

Bolger said she doesn't know how her grandmother coped with losing her first baby at six months and a son in the Navy.

"That was a very hearty generation," said Bolger, adding that her grandmother was honored to be part of the Gold Star mothers.

Bolger said there is a graveyard in the Philippines for the men that were killed. Her uncle's body, however, was never found. She has visited her uncle's headstone at Arlington National Cemetery.

Bolger said she has done research in hopes of finding a survivor who knew her uncle but has not been successful. She said any survivors would probably be in their 90s.

### **The naming of a sailing race**

Two years after Red Grant's death, Art Zucker at the Raritan Yacht Club decided to name the regatta for Red Grant, the only sailor lost from the club during the war.

"I'm sure my grandfather was bursting with pride," said Bolger, whose grandfather died in 1959.

Bolger said she used to go the regatta every year when her grandfather handed out the Red Grant trophy. In later years, her grandmother, mother and aunt proudly presented the race trophy, which is now housed in a case at the yacht club.

Bolger said her granddaughter, Dunellen resident Madison Watters, 16, took sailing lessons for about five years at the yacht club and for several years sailed in the Red Grant Regatta junior division.

"We were so proud," Bolger said.

With many of the old timers at the yacht club who knew her family now gone, Bolger is unsure how many know the history of the race.

Bolger said her family's history has given her great respect for veterans.

"They don't know what they are signing up for. They are so brave and so patriotic. So young," said Bolger, whose husband was in the military during Vietnam, serving in Scotland, and whose aunt's husband was an Army prisoner of war.

Her family also has given her a great love for the water.

"We all love the water, all of us," said Bolger, who enjoys relaxing in her swimming pool. "My children and my grandchildren love the water. There's some blood there, there is no doubt about it."

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