



Misadventures of a Civil War Submarine: Iron, Guns, and Pearls (Ed Rachal Foundation Nautical Archaeology Series)

James P. Delgado PhD

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In 2001, while vacationing on Panama's Pacific coast, maritime archaeologist James P. Delgado came upon the hulk of a mysterious iron vessel, revealed by the ebbing tides in a small cove at Isla San Telmo. Local inquiries proved inconclusive: the wreck was described as everything from a sunken Japanese "suicide" submarine from World War II to a poison-laden "craft of death" that was responsible for the ruin of the pearl beds, decades before.

His professional interest fully aroused, Delgado would go on to learn that the wreck was the remains of one of the first successful deep-diving submersibles, built in 1864 by Julius H. Kroehl, an innovator and entrepreneur who initially sought to develop his invention for military use during the Civil War. The craft's completion coming too late for that conflict, Kroehl subsequently convinced investors that it could be used to harvest pearls from the Pacific beds off Panama, in waters too deep for native pearl divers to reach.

In *Misadventures of a Civil War Submarine*, Delgado chronicles the confluence of technological advancement, entrepreneurial aspiration, American capitalist ambition, and ignorance of the physiological effects of deep diving. As he details the layers of knowledge uncovered by his work both in archival sources and in the field excavation of Kroehl's ill-fated vessel, Delgado weaves the tangled threads of history into a compelling narrative. This finely crafted saga will fascinate and inform professional archaeologists and researchers, naval historians, students and aficionados of maritime exploration, and interested general readers.



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