

# Grenade found in grass

By NANCY HILER

What should have been an uneventful afternoon of gardening under a beautiful, cloudless sky turned out to be anything but for one Bellmore senior last Saturday. While prepping an area of his front yard for grass seed, Tony Grande, 93, hit something with his shovel.

It was a hand grenade.

"I thought it was a root," Grande said. "I had the hedges taken out along the front, so I was digging about a foot or two down, getting the ground ready to plant grass seed there." Unsure what he had found, he washed it off with his garden hose. "Then I saw what it was, that it was a grenade. I was in the Army in World War II, so I had seen grenades before."

After his discovery, a dozen or so neighbors gathered around Grande at his home on Midwood Avenue. One neighbor told him he had called the police and was told to put the device in a metal container and bring it into the station. Grande said that with everyone talking at once and in the commotion that followed, he couldn't remember which neighbor told him this. Grande took the advice, though, and put the grenade in a metal bucket that one of the neighbors gave him. With the bucket in the backseat of her car, another

See SENIOR, page 4

## Senior uncovers hand grenade

Continued from front page  
er neighbor drove Grande to the 7th Precinct in Seaford.

Grande, whose spryness and quick wit belie his 90-plus years — he does 130 knee bends and spends 30 minutes on a stationary bike every day, and bowls two to three times a week — said he wished he had used common sense. "That was my mistake," he said. "I should have left it there and let [the police] come and take care of it."

When asked about the incident, that's precisely what Nassau County Detective Michael Bitsko said Grande should have done. "When it comes to any kind of device that you suspect may be dangerous, an explosive of any type, a gun, even fireworks, we recommend staying away from it," Bitsko said. "Don't touch it. Call 911 and we'll respond and take care of it." The bucket had no lid, and Grande said he realizes that the container itself, even if sealed, would have caused more harm than good had the grenade exploded. "That would have been more shrapnel," he said.

### A grenade in the precinct

Just before 1 p.m., Grande had the neighbor drop him off at the station. He walked into the building alone, holding the bucket. "The desk sergeant asked me, 'What you got there?'" Grande recalled. "When I told him what I had, he said, 'Don't move!'"

The grenade was moved outside the precinct, and the Arson Bomb Squad and Emergency Services Unit were called, police said. The surrounding area and roads, including a section of Merrick Road, were shut down and the station house was evacuated, Bitsko said.

"They kept me all the way down, on the extreme side of the building, and a female police officer asked me if I brought the grenade back with me from the war," Grande said. He told her he hadn't, that the only thing he'd brought back was his helmet.

While Grande was being questioned — for what he said was about two and a half hours — police were dispatched to his home, where they searched the rest of the property with metal detectors. Nothing else was found, police said.

"Then the bomb squad came with coats and vests made out of lead and picked up the can," Grande recounted. "They put an anti-explosive covering over it and took it away." Later on, Grande said, a police officer told him they took the grenade to a firing range. "They blew it up," he said, "so it was live."

"I really didn't think it was live," he added. The pin on the pineapple-shaped fragmentation grenade was corroded, he explained. "Still, I know you can't fool around with a grenade. I saw a lot of sol-



Nancy Hiler/Herald

**NINETY-THREE-YEAR OLD WORLD WAR II VETERAN TONY GRANDE** points to the spot in front of his Bellmore home where he dug up a hand grenade.

diers get hurt thinking a grenade wouldn't go off and it did."

Grande served as a motor sergeant in charge of troop vehicles during World War II. He shot down a German plane with a machine gun on Jan. 1, 1945, for which he received a medal and a commendation for meritorious service, described in a now dog-eared letter he received in 1965.

### Mystery remains

How and when the grenade came to be buried in his yard remains a mystery. Grande and his late wife purchased the home in 1952. "We bought it from former CIA Director William Casey," he said. Grande's daughter Phyllis Trapani said the deed had William Casey's name on it, as well as that of Casey's mother, a joint property owner at the time.

The hedges that Grande had removed recently were there when he bought the house, he said. "We had tons of cousins playing in the yard all the time," Trapani said, adding that she was shocked when her father told her of his discovery.

The fragmentation grenade Grande described is of the type that was used during World War II and up until the Vietnam War, called the Mk2 pineapple. It was designed to damage or destroy its target with a burst of flying shrapnel, and has a casualty radius of about 100 feet.

Comments about this story? [NHiler@lherald.com](mailto:NHiler@lherald.com) or (516) 569-4000 ext. 234.