Under international law, nations have a duty to cooperatively protect maritime heritage for the benefit of the public. The German government confirms it retains ownership of U-576 and has requested that the United States government preserve and protect the vessel as it would one of its own.

The U.S. recognizes Germany’s ownership, and that as a sovereign vessel, it is immune from arrest under the law of salvage and otherwise. It is U.S. policy to use its laws to protect foreign sunken warships like the U-576.

Further, NOAA and Germany agree that U-576 and other sunken vessels are maritime graves that should be treated with respect and not disturbed without authorization. See the Presidential Statement on United States Policy for the Protection of Sunken State Craft. Federal Register Volume 69, Number 24 (Thursday, February 5, 2004) [Pages 5647-5648].

Source: NOAA Office of General Counsel