

Ellington man an expert in naval history

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ELLINGTON — T. Garth Connelly's fascination with all things naval began when he was 3, his mother, Rita, says.

And it hasn't abated.

Connelly, now 49, has written four books on specific types of boats used in World Wars I and II. He's considered an expert in his field.

He has a specialized boat, made the way they make boats in Europe, with the controls reversed. With his family's home on Cape Cod, Connelly has plenty of opportunity to use it.

His achievements are all the more remarkable because Connelly has cerebral palsy, a neurological condition that affects muscle control and movement. He lives in an apartment off his parents' kitchen in their home at 9 Heather Road.

Connelly went through public school when it was rare for a child with his condition to attend. Rita believes that he was the first child with cerebral palsy to go through the local school system.

Connelly graduated from Ellington High School and went on to Central Connecticut State University, where he got his bachelor's degree in history and anthropology. He worked at Travelers from 1985 to 2008.

Sharing his love of boats

But Connelly decided to work with his love of the ocean and boats, using his background in research to write books about military history, covering everything from battleships to PT boats.

Connelly has written four books: "PT Boats in Action," "Vosper MTBs in Action," (co-authored) "Schnellboot in Action," and "U.S. 110' Subchasers in Action."

PT boats are small combat vessels designed to operate in shallow waters for patrol and fast attack duties. Before becoming president, John F. Kennedy was commander of a PT boat in the Pacific during World War II, which became the subject of a book and a popular movie, "PT 109."

Publishing his books through Squadron Signal Publications, a subsidiary of MMD Holdings Inc., Connelly isn't writing his books for the money. Connelly wants people to be more aware of naval history and how it affected the world wars.

His most recent work, the Subchasers book, came out this year, and Connelly dedicated it to his grandfather and father, along with other men who served on this type of vessel.

Connelly's grandfather and father, who served in World War I and World War II respectively, make this book more than special for him.

"I found it interesting that they both served on two generations of the type" of boat "in two wars and that, during the time they were on their respective boats, in two different wars, they had the same rank: bosun's mate," Connelly said in an e-mail.

Connelly begins by reading previous books on the vessel, usually too many to count. Then he begins communicating with others in his profession and with museums, putting everything together.

His books are packed with information and one-of-a-kind pictures.

The researching never stops, Connelly says, because even when he is done writing one of his books, he learns more and more that he didn't put in the first time around.

He's revised his PT boat book and he has recently been informed that his schnellboot book will be revised as well.

Connelly says he's always loved small combat vessels and "just wants to share his knowledge about these forgotten and overlooked vessels."

In addition to writing books, Connelly is a consultant on model boats — not the ones you play with in your pool but glass-case, museum-quality models that are handmade.

With a team of modelers who help him build his replicas, Connelly has boats in his homes in Ellington and on Cape Cod.

Connelly's articles have been featured in *Model Ship Builder*, *Ships in Scale*, *Model Ship Journal*, and the *International Plastic Modelers Society's Modelers Journal* since 1996.

Well-known in his world

Not many people outside the PT boat world know about T. Garth Connelly, but he's a celebrity in his field.

One day Connelly was at a museum and saw PT boat models in a glass case. Perfectionist that he is, he told the curator that the coloring of one of the boats was wrong. The curator didn't believe him.

Soon after James "Boats" Newberry, founder of a veterans group known as PT Boats Inc. in Germantown, Tenn., went to the same museum. The curator told Newberry that someone had said that the color of one of the boats was wrong. Newberry asked if the man who said that was in a wheelchair. The curator said, "Yes." And Newberry told him, "Then he's right, the color's wrong."

In 2000, Connelly was honored with the Clean Sweep Award by PT Boats Inc. for his "continuing effort to promote the history of PT boats in World War II."

Connelly is working with the naval attaché from the Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C., to get more information on the Italian version of a PT-type boat in WWII.

Throughout his home, there are letters of thanks from veterans, admirals, and even George H. W. Bush.