Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE: an Informal History
by
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Prologue.

The United States Navy's traditional role in American history has been one of a "blue water" force. It has been organized and equipped to control the open seas and coastal areas. However, during the Civil War (1862 to 1865) the role of the fleet expanded to the inland waterways of the United States. Decisive land battles were often influenced by the Navy's success or failure to control these vital transportation and communication resources.

One hundred years later, the Navy was faced with similar situations while defending the Republic of Viet Nam. Conventional naval presence was off shore in the form of the Seventh Fleet with its aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and amphibious units. In 1964 the inshore warfare role was expanded by the establishment of a base for fast patrol boats (PTF) at Da Nang, RVN. The PTF's were assigned to Mobile Support Team ONE (the deployed name for Boat Support Unit ONE assets). From 1964 through 1972, the PTF's conducted a secret and deadly war with North Vietnamese forces on and above the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

PTF-3, the lead “Nasty”-class boat for the US Navy, shows off the speed that was the hallmark of the PTF in this 1964 photo. PTF-3 survived eight hard years of war and is now being restored by Boy Scout Troop 544, Orange City, FL. (Photo: Mark Tondel)
As the Navy's coastal patrol and interdiction resources grew, gas turbine-powered gunboats (PG’s) and later hydrofoils [USS FLAGSTAFF (PGH-1) and USS TUCUMCARI (PGH-2)] from BSU 1 joined the effort. The PGH-1 and PGH-2 operated out of the Da Nang base. The complex nature of the PGH and lack of logistics support saw them phased-out of the coastal interdiction role after a six month trial. Both PGH-1 and PGH-2 were returned stateside in early 1970. USS FLAGSTAFF remained at Coronado, CA while USS TUCUMCARI transferred to Little Creek, VA. In 1971, the Boat Support Units ONE and TWO were re-designated Coastal River Squadrons ONE and TWO.

At the end of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War in 1972, the PTF’s and PG’s, were reassigned. Some of the boats went to the Pacific Fleet Amphibious Base at Coronado, CA; some went to the Atlantic Fleet Amphibious Base at Little Creek, VA.

The USS CANON (PG-90) shows why they called it the Brown Water Navy in Viet Nam. (Photo: US Navy)
In the July - August 1972 time frame, Naval Reservists in the Midwest were told about the formation of two new units: Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE at Great Lakes, IL and Coastal River Division 22 at New Orleans, LA. These units were initially scheduled to operate fast patrol boats (PTF). The Coastal River Divisions in the Midwest were under the operational control of Coastal River Squadron TWO, Little Creek, VA. In the case of CRD 21, as constituted, it had billets for 47 active duty officers and enlisted and SEALs, and 105 selected reservists. The billet structure of CRD 21 was heavily weighted towards LTjg and LT slots for the officers and petty officers PO1 through PO3 for the enlisted. There were virtually no non-rated enlisted members, a few PO3's, a majority of PO2's and PO1's, and no chief petty officer billets. [This lack of CPO slots would become a problem later on for]
senior PO1's.] The CRD was special in that it required 60 drills per year, as opposed to the normal 48, plus the annual two week's AcDuTra. The mission statement of CRD 21 was this:

"Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE was commissioned to perform the following missions: to maintain craft to support coastal surveillance operations; develop small boat tactics; train personnel in the operation and maintenance of coastal craft in cold weather; conduct and support special and naval inshore warfare operations; conduct and support special psychological and tactical cover and deception operations; and train the selected reserve component to support these tasks in the event of mobilization."

Insignia of Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE: a PTF superimposed over the background of the five Great Lakes of the Midwest.

I arranged with the personnel office at my local unit, NRSD 9-17(M), to do an interview for prospective members at Great Lakes as my September drill. With my past experience on PTF-13 while attached to Boat Support Unit ONE in Coronado, I was easily accepted and joined the interview team. By October 1972, CRD 21's billets were being filled, and in November 1972 we began our scheduled drills. Drills were held at the boat house, Building 13 at the Naval Base, Great Lakes, IL.
ETNSN Mike Prather receives his commendation from the Chief of Naval Operations on the arrival of PTF-17 and PTF-19 at Great Lakes, IL. The presenting officer is RADM Draper L. Kauffman, Commandant of the Ninth Naval District. RADM Kauffman was the father of the Underwater Demolition Teams that became today’s SEALs.
A copy of the PTF-17 and PTF-19 crew list taken from the handouts given to the public during their port calls as the boats made their way from Little Creek to Great Lakes. (Mike Prather)
PTF-17 and -19 coming into the harbor at Great Lakes in the Fall of 1972. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)

A broadside shot of PTF-17 as she passes the Great Lakes breakwater to the inner boat basin. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)
PTF-17 (inboard) and PTF-19 (outboard) nested alongside the pier at Great Lakes. The boat house, Bldg 13, is directly behind the bridge of PTF-17. The large building on top of the hill (above the PTF-19 radar) at the far left is the Great Lakes Naval Hospital. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)

Aboard PTF-17 showing Bldg 13 that became the headquarters of CRD 21. The large silver pipes (and large pipes on the pier) are part of the steam heating system for the whole base. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)
Bridge shot of PTF-19. Note that Plexiglas windshields are erected in all these Fall photos. Being on an open bridge in early Spring or late Fall/early Winter was COLD. The hinged windshield gave some weather protection in these conditions. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)

The big tree on the far shore to the left of the 40mm on PTF-19 is where the synchrolift was built in 1973. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)
PTF-17 visitors check out the boat. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)

An other shot of the nested PTF-17 and PTF-19 from the pier. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)
The pier at Great Lakes in the Fall of 1972. By the time CRD 21 was decommissioned on 30 June 1076, a permanent guard shack had been erected at the entrance as well as a chain-link fence and gate; mooring facilities on both sides had been improved, shore power and sanitary facilities were upgraded, and the inner basins on both sides of the pier had been dredged and deepened. PG’s usually tied-up to the left of the pole; PTF’s were on the right as shown here. (Photo: Ed Ellegood)

As organized, CRD 21 operated on two weekends out of a given month for training when we received our first PTF’s (PTF-17 and PTF-19) in the summer of 1972 to get the maximum training time for the reservists. The members riding the boats were split into BLUE and GOLD boat crews and BLUE and GOLD maintenance staff. One drilled the first or second weekend of the month and the other drilled the third or fourth weekends. The boat crews ran the boats and the maintenance staff made sure the boats could operate. As luck would have it, CRD 21 was heavily staffed with Vietnam combat-savvy Reservists. Not only did the combat-savvy Reservists outnumber their active duty counterparts, but they had more operations expertise -- although most of it was on "Swift" boats or river patrol boats (PBR).
PTF-17 of CRD 21 gets underway on a chilly Fall morning at Great Lakes in 1974. (Photo: Bill Van Ooyen)

PTF-17 of CRD 21 ready to head out of Great Lakes harbor on a chilly Fall morning in 1974. (Photo: Bill Van Ooyen)
Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE was officially commissioned on 16 June 1973. Its first commanding officer was LCDR James E. Roper, of Golconda, IL. Previous to his appointment as the CO of CRD 21, Commander Roper had served as the CO of River Divisions 514 and 572 in Vietnam and as Training Support Officer, Service School Command at Great Lakes, IL. Commander Roper had served duty tours aboard USS BAYFIELD (APA-33), USS COWELL (DD-547), USS ARIKARA (ATF-98), the Naval Ordnance Lab at Solomons, MD and was a graduate of the Anti-submarine Warfare School at San Diego, CA. The Chief of Staff for CRD 21 was LCDR Edward Grace.

One of the early problems faced by CRD 21 was gunnery exercises. During World War 2 the Navy had established a gunnery range in the middle of Lake Michigan. This area was well-known to the mariners who plied the lakes because the Navy had a presence on the Great Lakes in those days that it maintained after the war was over. During the mid-1950s and all of the 1960s, the Navy's "Corn Belt Fleet" was instrumental in educating lots of would-be sailors on the details of running a ship. These ships were the USS DANIEL A. JOY (DE-585), USS PARLE (DE-708), USS PORTAGE (PCE-902), USS HAVRE (PCE-877), and USS AMHERST (PCE(R)-853). However, by 1 May 1970 the last of the "Corn Belt Fleet" -- the USS PARLE -- was retired and though the gunnery range remained on the charts, it became dormant until CRD 21 was established.

CRD 21 reopened the gunnery range for its use and the appropriate Notices to Mariners (NOM) were published. The crews of the freighters and ore boats
that sailed the lakes had forgotten about the gunnery range. Although the NOM specifically warned them about its use by the boats of CRD 21, there always seemed that someone never got the word.

One day, PTF-17 and PTF-19 went out to use the range. The exercise was a local surface shoot with their 40mm guns on an improvised target of oil drums and pallets painted international orange. A thousand foot freighter, obviously under auto pilot, sailed through the middle of the impact area and resisted all attempts to contact her to warn of the danger. A "cease fire" was given until the freighter cleared the range.

"Surface action starboard!" A 1974 photo by ENS Tim Sammons shows GMG1 Bob Moore (SEAL) as the loader and EM1 Mac McKinney as the trainer during a gunnery exercise with the 40mm gun on PTF-17. Note the tied-off colors to prevent the loader from being whipped by the flag. The 40mm was newly-installed after an overhaul at NAD Crane, Indiana. That explains why it is still painted haze grey instead of green. Note that the bridge windshield is lowered for increased visibility. (Photo: Tim Sammons)

In the first year of operation, CRD 21 ran its boats until December 5, 1972. On that day, PTF-17 and PTF-19 made the transit to Chicago, IL. Once through the locks at Chicago, the boats proceeded by the Chicago River to a civilian shipyard at Lemont, IL. At Lemont, the boats were taken out of the water on their cradles and put ashore for maintenance.

The yard period at Lemont, IL was a hard one for the active duty members and Reservists of CRD 21. Every work day, they had to commute forth and back to the yard by a large Navy bus (it was a haze gray-painted school bus). It was at least an hour and a half down and a hour and a half back under the best
of circumstances. The winter of 1972 to 1973 was cold and snowy. The heater on the bus was not very reliable and it was a miserable trip when it decided to "sort of" work. When the Reserves came for training, we got to ride to Lemont on the same bus to work on the boats. The yard at Lemont turned out to be short of every kind of service except excuses. As soon as the ice was off the Chicago River, the boats were back in the water and they made their way back to Great Lakes in March.


Both BLUE and GOLD components of CRD 21 continued to hone the boat handling and seamanship skills during the 1973 operating season. Meanwhile, there would be no repeat of the Lemont shipyard problem. A brand new synchrolift for the PTF’s was built on the right side of the inner harbor at Great Lakes.
The shoreline maintenance facility for the PTF’s consisted of the synchrolift and a rail system that allowed the boats (with their cradles) to be winched off the lift and then parked ashore. The rail system also allowed the boats (and cradles) to be moved so that two boats could be set side-by-side with the third astern of the first two.

It was important to pull the wooden PTF’s out of the water once a year for two reasons. First, the harbor at Great Lakes iced-over from December through March. Second, the wooden hulls of the boats soaked-up about 2,000 pounds of water when they were afloat. Pulling the hulls from the water over the winter months allowed the water to evaporate and made the boats both lighter and faster.

As received, PTF-17 and PTF-19 came with their Vietnam-era weapons suites intact. That is, a Bofors Mk 3 Mod 0 40mm/L60 gun aft of the bridge, a pair of World War 2-vintage Oerlikon 20mm Mk 10 guns on either side of the bridge, and the Mk 2 Mod 1 81mm mortar/.50 caliber Browning machine gun forward. When the boats came out of storage after their 1973-1974 winter up-keep period, the Mk 10 guns had been replaced by the newer Mk 16 Mod 5 20mm machine guns. These guns were also fitted to PTF-18 before she was sent to join her sister CRD 21 boats in April of 1974.

PTF-17 gets to host an open house on July 3, 1973. The Mk 10 Oerlikon 20mm guns were used on PTF-17 and PTF-19 when they arrived at Great Lakes. The Mk 10 Oerlikons were replaced by the 20mm gun Mk 16 Mod 5 in 1974. Photo: Bill Smallshaw.

The Mk 16 Mod 5 20mm machine gun was a descendent of the World War 2 Hispano-Suiza 404 20mm gun. The British had purchased the gun from Switzerland to arm their Hurricanes and Spitfires because the four 20mm guns had more punch than the eight .303 caliber Browning machine guns when it came to shooting down German aircraft. Under Lend-Lease contracts the HS404 made its way
across the Atlantic. Once in America it became the AN-M1 and AN-M2 20mm aircraft gun. However, the lion's share of airborne armament during World War 2 was the AN-M2 (aircraft) .50 BMG. Problems with the wartime 20mm M1 and M2 guns resulted in a redesign called the AN-M3 and a variation called the Mk24. Like the Mk 10 guns they replaced, the Mk 16 Mod 5 guns shared the need for lubricated ammunition except that the lubricant changed from grease to semi-fluid lubricating oil (LSA).

Good photos of the Mk 16 are rare. Attached are pages from the actual Ordnance Pamphlets 3990 and 4410 that show the Mk 16 Mod 4 and 5 and its Mk 67 Mod 0 mount. The difference between the Mod 4 gun and the Mod 5 gun was its trigger. The Mod 4 used an electric trigger and the Mod 5 used a manually released sear as its trigger. (The electric trigger also had a manual release in case the power failed.) All PTF’s used the Mk 16 Mod 5 gun and the Mk 67 Mod 0 mount.

The gun itself was fired from a trigger lever on the right grip; the safety was located on the end of the right grip. The actual firing of the gun was by a flexible steel cable that attached to the trigger lever and connected to the sear on the gun. When the trigger lever was squeezed, the cable pulled the sear down and allowed the bolt to close and fire the weapon. The weapon would continue to fire as long as the trigger lever was squeezed or there ammunition was available.

- OP3990 Figure 2-1 shows the 20mm machine gun on its mount.
- OP3990 Figures 6-1 and 6-2 show the installation and limits of the gun and mount.
- OP4410 Figures 2-1 through 2-3 describe the 20mm gun and its parts.
Figure 2-1. Mount, Machine Gun, Mk 67 Mod 1
Figure 6-1. Train Working Circle
Figure 6-2. Elevation Working Circle
Chapter 2

DESCRIPTION

2-1 INTRODUCTION.

This chapter provides a general description of the 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mods 4 and 5 and their associated equipment which consists of a Feed Mechanism M2E7 LH or RH and Charger M6 (Modified).

2-2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

This section provides a general, physical, and detailed description of the 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mods 4 and 5, Feed Mechanism M2E7 LH and RH, and Charger M6 (Modified). Due to the similarity of the two machine guns and their associated equipment, they will be discussed as one except where they differ in design.

2-2.1 20mm MACHINE GUN MK 16 MODS 4 AND 5. The 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mods 4 and 5, figures 2-1 and 2-2, are modified M3 and Mk 24 Automatic Guns. They are automatic, air-cooled weapons, which are gas and blowback operated. The major difference between these guns and the M3 and Mk 24 Automatic Guns is the incorporation of an automatic chamber lubricator.

The M3 20mm Automatic Gun and the 20mm Mk 16 Mods 0, 1, and 2 are described in OP 1934.

The major difference between the 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mods 4 and 5 is the method of controlling the sear (firing the gun). The 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mod 4 uses an electric trigger (AH-M6 Modified) and a manual override lanyard. This combination

![Diagram of 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mod 4](image)

Figure 2-1. 20mm Machine Gun Mk 16 Mod 4 With Charger and Feed Mechanism
The arrival of our third PTF meant a restructuring of the BLUE and GOLD boat crews. By April, there wasn't a day that went by when one of the boats wasn't out for training of some kind. The operational tempo picked up speed.
On April 27, 1974, Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE had its first (and last) change of command. Commander Roper turned over control to LCDR Lowell T. (Tim) Johnston, of St. Petersburg, FL. Previous to his appointment as the CO of CRD 21, Commander Johnston had served as a senior advisory to Vietnamese Navy Coastal Group 14 while attached to the U.S. Naval Advisory Group, Saigon. Commander Johnston also served duty tours aboard USS AUCILLA (AD-56), USS MISSISSINEWA (AO-144), USS CROMWELL (DE-1014), USS SPRINGFIELD (CLG-7), the Naval Manpower and Material Analysis Center Atlantic (NMMACLANT) and the Naval Air Technical Training Center (NATTC) at Glynco, GA. By a curious coincidence, the CSO was LCDR James Johnston.

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At our change of command, the official word was CRD 21 was going to get three ASHEVILLE-class PG’s and three new Mk 3 "Sea Specter" Patrol Boats (PB). The PB’s never arrived but the PG’s came in the autumn of 1974.

Then a personnel problem raised its ugly head. As first constituted, CRD 21 had no CPO billets. This was a problem because we had a lot of senior 1st Class Petty Officers. If you were selected for Chief, then the "up and out" was applied to you. On 16 October 1974 I was the first victim of the policy; I made Chief Gunner's Mate (Guns). The unit could not keep me and I was officially transferred to NSRD 9-59(M) at the Great Lakes Naval Reserve Center. When I arrived at my new unit I found that I had been well and truly spoiled by CRD 21. They had real assets to train on while the NRC had, well, a "shipboard simulator" and little else. Then I came up with an idea. I asked my new CO if I could be detached on Temporary Additional Duty (TAD).
orders to CRD 21 indefinitely. He said it was OK with him if it was OK with the CO of CRD 21. It was and so I went TAD to CRD 21 for all intents and purposes including my enlisted evaluations. The only down side was that while I continued to get credit for 60 drills in retirement points, I only got paid for 48. I decided I could live with the pay cut because I loved what I was doing.

The arrival of the PG’s at Great Lakes in the autumn of 1974 did not help the CPO billeting problem. Although the PG’s had CPO’s on aboard and a limited number of CPO slots were created at CRD 21, these slots were for Chief Master-at-Arms and in supply; none were made available for the active duty or Reservists on the PTF’s.

As 1974 drew to a close, the question of what to do with the PG’s became important. It was decided that the PG’s would “winter-over” at the Chicago Naval Reserve Center pier where there was adequate heat and power. By the end of November 1974 the PG’s were in Chicago and the PTF’s were ashore for the winter maintenance period. The Reservists assigned to the PG crews did their drills at NRC Chicago and the PTF crews continued to drill at Great Lakes.

The year 1975 was the greatest year for CRD 21. We were fully manned and Great Lakes had its own Navy of three PG’s and three PTF’s. As soon as the ice was off Lake Michigan, the PG’s returned to Great Lakes from Chicago and operations commenced. Although I was TAD to CRD 21, I was still required to do my active duty for training (AcDuTra) with NRSD 9-59(M). However, since they did not have a ship or station assigned to them, I could determine where I took my training. I decided to go to the Fleet Combat Training Center Atlantic (FCTCL) at Dam Neck, VA. I got one week of a 3”/50 RF gun maintenance and a week on the Mk 16 Mod 5 20mm machine gun.

The installation of the Mk 16 Mod 5 was not a good choice for the PTF’s. The gun had several quirks that I learned about at the maintenance course. Unfortunately, while I was learning about the quirks, a CRD 21 gunner had so screwed-up two of the guns that they had to be sent back to the naval air station overhaul facility, NAS Alameda. The problem was two fold: (1) the specific maintenance requirements of the Mk 16 gun and (2) the idiot that worked on it. This particular GMG2 was one of the active duty members. Whenever he was around a gun and tools he became dangerous. The gun usually came out the loser, but he didn't hurt anyone. He was also completely oblivious to any advice by those who knew what they were doing. Two cases came about in rather short order.

Case 1: One of the PTF’s that gone out to shoot their new 20mm guns. (It had taken some time to return the old 20mm Oerlikon ammo to the depot and draw 20mm ammo for the Mk 16. The Mk 16 ammo was not the same and it was linked, where as the older 20mm was not.) The firing came off without a hitch and everyone liked the convenience of the belted ammunition. However, the problem came when the gun was cleaned. Since the Mk 16’s ancestry was for aircraft, it had lots of lockwire (to keep parts from loosening-up and falling off) as well as special tab washers in places where the lockwire
could not be used. The Mk 16 was unique in that the gun moved in recoil and counter recoil within a stationary cradle. The ammunition feeder was attached to the gun and a linkage attached it to the stationary cradle. The forth and back motion worked the feeder to bring rounds to the gun.

But, the gun had to run in a straight line. There were guides for the receiver and there was a barrel collar around the barrel to guide it. The barrel collar’s trunnions (two cylindrical pins) were shimmed relative to the stationary trunnion blocks to make sure the barrel ran true. If the shims were lost or reversed, the gun would not work or worked until it was damaged from the out-of-line recoil. The first thing GMG2 Idiot did was throw the shims away! The next time the gun was fired, it was damaged and had to go back to NAS Alameda. All this had happened while I was in Mk 16 20mm maintenance school. I was furious when I found out what had happened after I returned to the unit. We had a special 20mm training course that very weekend for the active duty and Reservist gunners.

Case 2: The problem with the AN-M2 Heavy Barrel (HB) caliber .50 Browning machine gun attached to the 81mm mortar was that it could not fire blanks. There was no blank adapter for the AN-M2HB but there was for the AN-M2 (Aircraft). The CRD 21 armory had been issued three AN-M2 (Aircraft) guns for the blank firing mission. As set-up, the gun had a blank adapter that screwed into the barrel jacket and a feedway filler piece that prevented live rounds from being fired by the gun when blanks were used. GMG2 Idiot was in-charge when they mounted the AN-M2 (Aircraft) to fire blanks. GMG2 Idiot did not make sure the two cap screws which held the blank firing adapter (BFA) to the barrel jacket were lockwired. The PTF got underway and began shooting blanks. No one noticed that the screws loosened-up and fell off. Firing continued and the BFA started to unscrew from the barrel jacket. Again no one noticed; what they focused on was that the gun was jamming. Firing resumed and then the BFA was blown off (lost overboard). This had happened just before I came in for drill. I heard about the problem and went to the shop where our .50 was.

GMG2 Idiot was attempting to remove the barrel jacket from the gun. I told him that he would damage the jacket (and the gun) the way he was doing it. I told him there was a specific order things had to be done in order to remove the jacket without damage. One had to pull the spring-loaded trunnion adapter pin back; unscrew the trunnion adapter and remove it; remove the trunnion adapter shim; and remove the barrel jacket set screw (which was underneath the trunnion adapter) before the barrel jacket would come off. We fussed with the trunnion adapter -- it was tight -- and then I was called away to a meeting. When I got back I found that GMG2 Idiot had gotten the jacket off. He’d put the gun’s receiver in a vise and used a 6-foot steel bar to crank off the barrel jacket. The trunnion adapter and shim were still in place; he’d sprung the receiver, stripped the barrel jacket set screw, and bent the barrel jacket. I went a pitched a bitch to the Chief-of-Staff. GMG2 Idiot was transferred back to Little Creek. The aircraft .50 became a source of spare parts.
The M-213 flexible helicopter .50 aircraft gun is very similar to the AN-M2 (aircraft) .50 machine guns we used to fire blanks. Our guns were the same except they had a trunnion adapter instead of the recoil damper (the can-shaped object at the end of the barrel jacket) and the blank adapter where the muzzle brake screws into the end of the barrel jacket on this gun. (Photo: US Army)

Late 1975 was also the year CRD 21 experimented with camouflage on the PTF’s. All three PTF’s were painted "Marine 123" which was a lusterless forest green. Each boat was camouflaged with the addition of combinations of gray and black. PTF-17 received a "disruptive" pattern of green, gray, and black scheme. PTF-18 received a "wave-mirror" pattern green, gray, and black scheme. PTF-19 received a "splinter" pattern of green, gray, and black.

PTF-17 in her new war paint. (Photo: Tim Sammons via Jim Gray)
PTF-17 in her new war paint leaves the harbor at Great Lakes. (Photo: Tim Sammons via Jim Gray)

LT Kurt Froyen's dramatic shot of PTF-17 crossing the wake of PTF-19 while doing local ops in Lake Michigan off Great Lakes in late 1975. At this time all three of the CRD 21 PTF's sported distinctive camouflage such as this. The black smoke plume from the twin Napier Deltic diesel engine exhausts is very prominent in this shot. The bridge windshield is again lowered for better visibility. (Photo: Kurt Froyen)
The year 1976 was the 200 year anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The personnel of CRD 21 looked forward to the anniversary only to have joy turn to sorrow. No matter what the accomplishments of the unit and no matter what the quality of the training they accomplished for the Naval Reserve, the Navy decided the Coastal River Division 21 was too expensive (read: they wanted the money for other pet programs and we weren't of high enough visibility). The word came down that CRD 21 would be decommissioned effective 30 June 1976. On or about 1 June 1976 the PG’s left for Little Creek. On 16 June the PTF’s followed the PG’s lead.

The decommissioning of Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE was the saddest event in my military career. There were the usual speeches and the reading of orders. The ceremonies were traditional, but all of us felt numb. We knew nothing could or would replace CRD 21. We were correct.
Coastal River Division TWENTY ONE has faded into history. Most of the people who made it go have either retired or will retire soon. The boat house, Building 13 is still there at Great Lakes. It serves as the headquarters for Assault Craft Unit ONE Detachment 1613. The ACU is a Reserve unit similar to CRD 21. Instead of PG’s or PTF’s they have three LCM-8 landing craft, mechanized. The LCM’s were brought to Great Lakes through the efforts of former CRD 21 members. The synchrolift that used to lift the PTF’s out of the water for maintenance is now used by the LCM’s. Training goes on, but no matter how good it can never approach the adrenaline rush of a 75-ton boat hurtling over the water at 40 knots propelled by two 3,100 horsepower diesels or a 242-ton ship charging through the water at 38 knots propelled by a 15,500 horsepower marine gas turbine.

Unlike its sister unit, Coastal River Division TWENTY TWO lived on, although its PTF’s (PTF-23 and PTF-25) were retired. On 1 March 1979, it became Special Boat Unit TWENTY TWO (along with the creation of two additional units – SBU 20 and SBU 24). There were several reorganizations and consolidations within the Special Boat Units after their creation. In 2002, the Special Boat Units became Special Boat Teams. The descendents of CRD 21 and CRD 22, Special Boat Teams 20 and 22, continue in the special operations role to this day.

On a personal note, I and the other Naval Reservists of CRD 21 received a career enhancement from our years on the PTF’s. We were some of the first reservists to qualify for the coveted (and at that time, new) Surface Warfare badge and allowed to add the (SW) to our official rate or rank. Members also received the designator of 9534, Fast Patrol Boat crewman. In 1992, the Navy created the new badge, Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crew (SWCC). Members that qualify for the SWCC badge get the
designator 9533 to identify them as small craft specialists in the special warfare mission. Members that are SWCC-qualified add (CC) to their rate or rank.

**Where Are They Now?**

Of the original 24 PTF boats, about half of them remain in various conditions. All three of the Coastal River Division 21 boats survive. PTF-17 now resides next to the USS LITTLE ROCK (CLG-4) at the Naval Museum in Buffalo, New York. Although the exterior is in good condition, the interior has been extensively cannibalized.

PTF-17 at the Naval Museum, Buffalo, New York. (Photo: Frank Cumberland)
PTF-18 is for sale by General Propulsion, Inc. in Newport News, VA. This boat is in running condition with overhauled Napier Deltic engines.

PTF-18 at Newport News, VA. (Photo: Dan Withers)
PTF-19 is part of a group of other PTFs for sale at Chesapeake Yachts, Suffolk, VA. PTF-19 boat is the only Trumpy-built boat; all the others are Norwegian “Nasty”-class: PTF-5 through PTF-7 and PTF-10 through PTF-12.

A recent photo of the PTFs at Chesapeake Yachts, Suffolk, VA. (Photo: Randy Bryant)