



The Royal Navy's Coastal Forces

Introduction of a Concept

Shortly after the start of the First World War, a group of young officers based in Harwich put forward their ideas to introduce a new concept; the Coastal Motor Boat (CMB). This was a small fast attack craft carrying a torpedo whose essence was speed and shallow draft. The very extensive use of mines made it extremely difficult for submarines and boats of considerable draft to approach enemy naval bases. The young officers, Lieutenants Hampden, Bremner and Anson, also considered such craft as ideal for delivering the then new Whitehead torpedo. In 1915, the Admiralty drew up a Staff Requirement and after successful trials, the 40ft hydroplane hull designed by Sir John Thornycroft was chosen. In August 1916, six 40ft Coastal Motor Boats were delivered to the Royal Navy - the first C.M.B flotilla.

These fast motor boats with their revolutionary single step hull were capable of a speed of 35 knots. With a crew of just three, their speed and shallow draft enabled them to penetrate and attack heavy ships in a defended anchorage. Each could carry either an 18 inch torpedo, two mines, or depth charges. The torpedo was fired out of the stern and the boat then had to turn sharply out the way. This was considered safe as long as the boat was traveling at the same speed as the torpedo!

Having established its sea-keeping credentials, the 40ft skimmer hull was extended to 55ft which, in addition to two officers, carried two motor mechanics and a wireless operator. Then came the 70ft boats which were able to carry heavier payloads. Together, these Coastal Motor Boats formed the Royal Navy's first offensive arm of small fast attack craft, which in due course came to be called "Coastal Forces". A base was set up at Osea Island on the river Blackwater in Essex and in the Fleet they were known as "The Suicide Club"! Other bases were quickly created at Harwich, Sheerness and Dover.

Their initial uses in The First World War involved anti-submarine operations and offensive operations against German Patrol Boats off Dunkirk, Zeebrugge and Ostend, invariably operating in intense minefields. The first notable CMB action was in 1917 when, off Dunkirk, a group of 40ft CMBs under the command of Lieutenant W. Beckett RN in CMB 4 sank a German destroyer and seriously damaged another. Beckett was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). CMB's were also deployed for other types of mission such as minelaying and anti-submarine work. At the Zeebrugge Raid in April 1918, a group of 40ft CMBs laid smoke screens to cover the cruiser Vindictive and blockships while they entered the heavily defended harbour. After the armistice in 1918-19, Britain was dragged into an "Undeclared War" against Bolshevik Russia. It was in the ensuing Baltic Campaign that CMBs came into the role they were designed for - not only in clandestine operations, secretly landing agents - but carrying out attacks against the Bolshevik Fleet which other craft stood little chance of approaching. This resulted in two unique major attacks and many other naval successes.

In April 1919 the 40ft CMB's No's 4 and 7, under the command of Lieutenant Augustus Agar RN



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operating in the Baltic, were loaned to the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). They were deployed in ferrying their agents in and out of Petrograd, passing through the defensive forts and skimming over the Bolshevik laid minefields. In June that year, Agar in CMB 4 penetrated a screen of 4 destroyers to torpedo and sink the Bolshevik heavy cruiser *Oleg* off Kronstadt. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his action and two of his crew were awarded gallantry medals.

As a direct result of the *Oleg* success, Admiral Sir Walter Cowan, Commander of the Navy's Baltic Force, subsequently decided to mount a CMB attack against the Bolshevik Fleet inside the Kronstadt naval fortress itself. His force of light cruisers and destroyers had already been outgunned by the Bolshevik battleships and he had lost a cruiser and two destroyers to mines and submarines. A hastily assembled flotilla of eight 55ft CMBs was towed from Osea Island to the Baltic. On 18th August 1919, in co-ordination with the newly formed Royal Air Force, they attacked the Russian Fleet inside Kronstadt Harbour, in an action which became known as "The Kronstadt Raid". Two battleships and a submarine depot ship were sunk or disabled, harbour facilities damaged and a destroyer sunk later by mines laid by CMB 7, for the loss of three CMBs sunk and two damaged. Commander Frank Dobson, RN and Lieutenant Gordon Steele RN were awarded VCs, with many other decorations awarded to the Commanding Officers and crews. The Russian Baltic Fleet did not put to sea again for the remainder of the campaign.

After the Kronstadt Raid, Admiral Sir Charles Madden the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet wrote, *"This successful enterprise will rank among the most daring and skillfully executed of Naval Operations of this War. On no other occasions during hostilities has so small a force inflicted so much damage on the enemy."*

By 1922, the CMB flotillas had been disbanded. Over 100 boats overall, both 40, 55 as well as some 70ft, were built during the CMBs lifetime, but the Admiralty cuts of the 1920s signalled their demise. Between the wars CMBs had been overtaken and replaced by a new generation of Motor Torpedo and Gun Boats, with just a few 70ft CMBs remaining afloat, mainly in a coastal anti-submarine role. It took another World War, twenty years later, to see Coastal Forces resurrected to become a huge, expanded arm of naval service.

In 2016, 100 years after the first CMBs were delivered to the Royal Navy, there were just two original 40ft CMB hulls remaining - the iconic CMB4 preserved ashore at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford and CMB 9 which has been converted for private use with just a small engine, based at Avonmouth. There is one remaining 55ft CMB, CMB 331, which belongs to the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Additionally, one post-First World War 70ft CMB remains, CMB 301, which is preserved at Chatham Historic Dockyard.

For CMBs, the operations in 1919 in the Baltic were the scene for their greatest success. They were also fortunate to have found in Cowan an Admiral who saw and was able to exploit immediately their offensive potential. Neil Pilford, historian at the Imperial War Museum wrote,



"The paralysis of the Russian Fleet after the attack on Kronstadt offered the Allies a remarkable strategic opportunity if they and the White Forces had been able to co-ordinate their efforts. Certainly the actions of the CMBs in the Baltic represent a startling example of flexibility and economy of means in the application of Military Power: they also embody those qualities of Resource and Personal Bravery, which, when men bring them to even the most contentious of their affairs, compel our admiration and respect".

Second World War

Although seriously depleted as the prospect of the Second World War loomed, Coastal Forces were to develop into an important branch of the service and make a major and vital contribution to the naval successes of the war. Manned largely by peacetime volunteer reserves and wartime sailors, the Motor Torpedo Boats (MTBs), Motor Gun Boats (MGBs) and Motor Launches (MLs) could be found increasingly at the forefront of naval engagements as the war developed. However, Britain entered the war with just a handful of Coastal Forces boats, mostly as a result of private enterprise and with very little planning or input from the Admiralty.

As previously described, Coastal Motor Boats (CMBs) and Motor Launches were not new to the Royal Navy. Nevertheless, the success of the boats in these early days was not sufficient to stave off the sense of complacency which persisted between the wars and which resulted in this branch of the Navy being gradually run down. The expertise, which had been so carefully developed and the valuable lessons learnt were to quickly disappear so that the Royal Navy was ill prepared in this sphere of naval warfare as the Second World War approached. However, Lieutenant Agar's contribution, (later as a Captain RN) had left a lasting legacy on which the service was to build, ultimately with great success.

In addition to the handful of assorted Coastal Forces craft based in home waters at the start of the war, there was an MTB flotilla based at Malta, working on occasions with the Mediterranean Fleet. These 12 boats were built to a design by Hubert Scott-Paine at his British Power Boat Company at Hythe on the Southampton Water. However the true value of these craft was not greatly appreciated by the senior officers running the Fleet, who remained convinced that future naval requirements lay in its heavily armed battleships, battle cruisers and destroyers. Following a frustrating period for the men of this flotilla in the early days of the war, they received orders in November 1939 to return the boats to England. What followed was a traumatic journey through the Mediterranean to Marseille in treacherous weather, with the loss of one boat. The most seaworthy of the boats then made the passage through the French canals, with 9 boats arriving back in the UK shortly before Christmas 1939. The re-call of the 1st Flotilla 10 weeks after the outbreak of war in many respects signalled the build up of Coastal Forces and the start of a quite amazing story of innovation in design and production, combined with operational courage and skill.

By 1941, the increase in the number, type and capability of boat was dramatic and they were increasingly at sea harassing the enemy and performing a range of aggressive operations around the English Coast and North Sea. The MGBs, MTBs and MLs developed in the Second World War performed a wide range of tasks, frequently operating close to enemy occupied coasts, attacking enemy shipping in



the Channel and protecting convoys on their passage around our coasts. When they did meet the enemy, engagements were fought at very close quarters in conditions which are very difficult to envisage in our modern day navy. They were small wooden craft, heavily laden with high-octane fuel, carrying a large quantity of ammunition and invariably operating at night without radar and with very few navigational aids. The average age of the crews in Coastal Forces was barely 20 years old. These people were to conduct nearly 1000 close fought engagements and gain a high concentration of bravery and distinguished service awards throughout the war.

In the early months of the war, the British Government recognised the vulnerability of their shipping from German attacks and particularly from enemy submarines. The Admiralty came to the view that a fleet of fast surface craft, armed with torpedoes, depth charges and guns, should be built without delay and this started a most dramatic chain of events. By the end of the war the number of Coastal Forces craft built for the Royal and Commonwealth Navies was over 1,850 and a continuous programme of improvement and development had been maintained throughout. Hard chined wooden hull craft were built to the designs of a number of firms, notably those of Vosper, The British Power Boat Company, Thornycroft and The Fairmile Company. Dozens of shipyards and boat builders around the country were put to the task and further production was undertaken in the United States. This intense boat building activity produced its own dominant personalities capable of meeting this national challenge and it also produced intense rivalry.

Hubert Scott-Paine, already mentioned, was an entrepreneur who had been involved in the production of light aircraft and motor craft since 1927 and this had brought him both experience and considerable wealth. It was Scott-Paine's passion for speed on water that led to his conviction that the Royal Navy should have flotillas of fast motorboats carrying torpedoes. He was able to put his ideas into action at his British Power Boat Company at Hythe, on the Southampton Water, although his flamboyant personality did not always impress those at the Admiralty. Scott Paine, assisted by his brilliant Chief Designer George Selman, were to produce various designs of British Power Boat, which performed most effectively as MTBs and MGBs in Home Waters. For ease of production and the supply of engines, he took his design skills to the USA where he contributed to the massive boat production programme in both Canada and the USA from 1939 to 1951.

Scott-Paine's great rival in the building of boats for the Admiralty was Commander Peter Du Cane, whose Vosper Company had built the prototype hard-chine MTB 102 which, to Scott-Paine's annoyance, the Admiralty quickly decided to buy and which was to be the forerunner of the standard Vosper MTB design. There is little doubt that the rivalry between Scott-Paine and Du Cane produced that competitive edge which could only have benefited the development of Coastal Forces craft in both design development and in projecting this to the Admiralty.

The third of many builders of Coastal Forces craft who cannot go without mention is Noel Macklin of the Fairmile Company. Here was another charismatic personality who was as well known for his motor car racing and flying, as he was for his car manufacturing. He had achieved success in the 1930s in building the Invicta and Railton cars at his Fairmile Engineering Company at Cobham and his background in the



Royal Navy during the First World War led him to believe that there was a need for a large number of anti-submarine vessels. He applied his vision and immense energy to the concept of assembling boats of his prefabricated design at the scores of boat yards around the country. His design was different from others in that his boats were considerably larger, somewhat slower and, for the first time with these small craft, were intended to accommodate the crew permanently onboard.

From an initial Fairmile Marine Company design of a 110-foot Motor Launch, which was to become the Fairmile A, this led to the successful “maid of all work” the Fairmile B Motor Launch, an Admiralty design of which several hundred were to be built during the war. The extremely effective Admiralty designed Fairmile D followed. This was a larger, far more heavily armed MGB and MTB than anything previously produced. These powerful boats were designed to meet the threat of the faster German Navy E-Boats. With an overall length of 115 foot and powered by four Packard petrol engines, running on 100 octane fuel, the Fairmile D had a maximum speed of 30 knots and a maximum range of some 500 miles.

The complement of three officers and 32 ratings were invariably young and inexperienced in the early part of 1942 when these boats came into service. Although the early British Power Boats and Vospers had initially been commanded by young RN officers, the increasing number of RNVR officers began to man and command Coastal Forces craft, particularly the Fairmile Ds. Many were thrust into Command with barely a handful of months as the Navigating Officer or First Lieutenant of a short boat. The Fairmile D “Dog Boat” was to serve with considerable distinction in home waters and, particularly, in the Mediterranean. The common thread in the story of the three brilliant men who pioneered the development of these Coastal Forces craft was their vision and conviction in the Royal Navy’s need for these high-speed Coastal Forces craft and their courage in risking large amounts of their own money to design and build the craft whilst confronting the inertia of the Admiralty.

The 1st MTB flotilla became operational from Felixstowe in January 1940, marking the defacto founding of Coastal Forces. It was not until September of that year, however, that 3 MTBs performed the first successful torpedo attack of the war, destroying an ammunition ship inside Ostend harbour. Boats available in the Dover Strait were few in number, slow and unreliable. In November 1940, Rear Admiral Piers Kekewich was appointed Flag Officer Coastal Forces to coordinate the design and production of boats and to act as a go between for the Admiralty and the various commands. This was an important landmark and the Admiral’s position was undoubtedly strengthened by the appointment of Captain A.W.S. Agar VC as his staff officer, bringing valuable experience to the role. Nevertheless, despite some marked successes, things were still slow to improve. Lessons were being learnt in the North Sea and English Channel and techniques of combined MTB and MGB operations against enemy shipping was becoming tried and proven. MTBs were driving home attacks on enemy shipping but repeated use of the combined open assault soon resulted in the element of surprise being lost. The German reaction was to strengthen their convoy escorts and increase their awareness, leading to mounting British losses.

Both Britain and to a lesser extent Germany, depended on Merchant Shipping to feed and provide for their populations. Behind defensive mine fields, supply convoys followed cleared channels along the opposing coasts. German convoys were generally smaller than British ones but were very heavily



guarded by Destroyers, Torpedo Boats, armed Trawlers, E boats and Raumboote, Motor Minesweeping and Patrol Boats (R boats). This was the challenge that the British MGBs and MTBs faced. Once Germany had invaded the Low Countries and France, Britain's East Coast Convoys came within range of German MTBs, the Schnellboote, christened E-boats by the British. So great were the dangers of the E-boats that the waters off East Anglia became known as 'E-boat Alley'. By waylaying the E-boats at the start or the end of their nightly forays into the Channel, British MGBs gradually curbed surface attacks on Allied coastal shipping. At the same time MTB activity increasingly deterred German convoys from making the perilous passage of the Dover Strait. Also, clandestine operations took the boats close into the shores of enemy occupied France, Holland and Norway. The introduction from 1942 of the Fairmile D craft, 115-foot long and of 90 tons displacement, lent a decided edge to the activities of Coastal Forces. Both as a torpedo boat and as a gunboat it played a major part in the 'battle of the narrow seas' at a time when German light naval forces were already stretched by commitments in the Black Sea, the Baltic and the Mediterranean. As the war progressed, the sphere of operations of Coastal Forces increased from the English Channel and North Sea to the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean and on to Burma. Coastal Forces operations in the North Sea and English Channel were to produce a large number of heroes, none more prominent than Lieutenant-Commander Robert Hitchens DSO*, DSC**, 5 Mentions in Despatches (MIDs). Robert Hitchens was killed in April 1943, but during his time in Coastal Forces he became an inspirational leader, not only developing the tactics to be used by Coastal Forces but also leading in the development of boats.

The history of Coastal Forces in the Mediterranean started with the return of the 1st MTB Flotilla through the French canals and, after a short break, resumed in October 1940 with the forming of the 10th Flotilla of MTBs at Alexandria. These Thornycroft boats suffered badly from constant engineering problems, a lack of support and the absence of radar but, nevertheless, undertook sterling work. The arrival of more advanced Vosper craft with more effective armament was a help, but a major turning point was undoubtedly the arrival of the 115 foot, heavily armed, Fairmile D "Dog Boats" in 1943. This was the start of a Coastal Forces presence that was to increase dramatically as the war progressed. Their operations were to stretch the length of the Mediterranean to the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. By the end of the war the number of MTBs alone operating in these areas had increased to over 150 and 40 of these would be lost by the end of the war. Coastal Forces played an important part in many of the major operations in the Mediterranean, from supporting Allied operations along the coast of North Africa, to Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily to supporting the Partisans in defeating the enemy around the Adriatic coast of Croatia.

Coastal Forces contributed greatly to many naval events of the war. When the German battle cruisers *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and the heavy cruiser *Prince Eugen*, left Brest harbor in 1942 after sheltering there for nearly a year, heading for Germany by means of a dash through the Dover Strait in broad daylight, Coastal Forces boats made a gallant albeit unsuccessful attempt to stop them. Through a series of communication errors on the British side, the 3 ships with heavy air and surface support were off Boulogne before Dover MTBs were alerted. Additionally, the aircraft intended for stopping such a breakout, six Royal Navy Fairey Swordfish torpedo bombers based at Manston, were not available. On that morning of the 12 February 1942, five MTBs went to sea to press an attack on the battle cruisers



although the dense screen of escort vessels prevented all but the most optimistic of torpedo attempts. The arrival of help from Motor Gunboats diverted some of the German escorts attention, allowing torpedo bomber crews to press home the attack with hopeless determination.

Operation Chariot, the Combined Operations raid on St Nazaire in 1942 was another event with involvement of Coastal Forces. The intention of this raid, one of the most daring of the Second World War, was to breach the caisson in the entrance to the massive dock, an integral part of the St Nazaire port. Success would remove the docking facility for the German Battleship *Tirpitz*. Coastal Forces were to play a major role in this action but at a great cost. Of the 16 Coastal Forces craft which took part in the operation, one turned back with engine trouble, 10 were sunk by the enemy, three had to be scuttled and only two returned safely. Of the seven VCs which were awarded for the action that night, a posthumous award was made to Able Seaman Savage of Coastal Forces and his citation added the fact that the award was also in recognition of, "the valour shown by many other unnamed in MLs, MGBs, MTBs who gallantly carried out their duty in extremely exposed positions against enemy fire at close range".

Before, during and after the Normandy Landings, Coastal Forces were involved in a variety of both offensive and defensive operations designed to facilitate the invasion. Before the invasion, they defended home harbours to prevent the invasion fleet being bottled up by mines laid by E boats, whilst also mining continental ports to restrict enemy shipping movements. They also were heavily involved in the laying of protective minefields to flank the invasion passage and escorted the invasion armada on its crossing to Normandy. Once the invasion was underway, they engaged E-Boats based in Cherbourg and Le Havre often in cooperation with frigates. They also assisted the defence of frigates and destroyers against torpedo attack and intercepted hostile craft from outside the invasion area.

No account of wartime Coastal Forces would be complete without a mention of the contribution made by allied navies. The Free-French Navy manned 11 heavily armed 125 foot *chasseurs* and operated a number of B-Class MLs from Portland and Vosper boats from Dartmouth. The Royal Netherlands Navy had experience of CMBs prior to the war and had commissioned the build of twenty 70-foot MTBs just prior to the start of the Second World War. This build programme was interrupted by the German invasion of Holland and, in the event, only TM 51 actually sailed under the Dutch flag, but to great effect. The Polish Navy operated an increasing number of boats from British shores as the war progressed, eventually forming two flotillas. The Royal Norwegian Navy also formed the Norwegian manned 54th MTB Flotilla under the command of Pers Danielsen operating from Lerwick in the Shetland Islands. Their "Dog Boats" were regular commuters to the Norwegian fjords where they harassed the enemy and supported commando operations. The US made a major contribution with their PT boats in the Mediterranean and the Canadians operated wholly manned national flotillas in Home Waters towards the end of the war. Additionally, there were many Canadians who had come to the UK at the outbreak of war and who served as RNVR, totally integrated in the Royal Naval crews. The Canadians were to serve with great distinction in both Home Waters and the Mediterranean and, regrettably, the Canadian 29th Flotilla was involved in perhaps the worst disaster of Coastal Forces craft in the war. An explosion in one of the Canadian boats while the 29th Flotilla was lying in Ostend harbour resulted in the



loss of 60 lives along with seven British and five Canadian MTBs, all in the space of 7 minutes. Major contributions were also made from the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZNVR), the Royal Australian Navy and the South African Navy.

Post Second World War

The end of the Second World War saw a massive reduction in Coastal Forces, although the Royal Navy continued to use various types of fast patrol boats until the late 1970s. Coastal Forces bases around the British coast closed with cessation of hostilities although HMS Hornet at Gosport continued in commission until 1957. After a long period of uncertainty over its future, the base then developed into the Hornet Sailing Centre.

Some Second World War Vosper, British Power Boats, Fairmile Bs and Camper and Nicholsons craft were retained until the mid-1950s. Nine ex short British Powerboat MTBs were modified as the "Proud Class" and a large number of Harbour Defence Motor Launches were re-designated as Seaward Defence MLs and used for a wide range of coastal tasks. These were joined by the Gay Class, twelve interchangeable MTB / MGBs which entered service during 1953 and 1954 at the start of the Korean War. These Gay Class, a 71' 6" craft with a displacement of 50 tons and of wood construction and with three Packard engines, proved to be the last of the traditional high octane petrol craft to enter service. These boats were largely a repeat of wartime designs, which served an interim purpose until the diesel machinery was available for a totally new design to be known as the Dark Class. Entering service at the same time in 1953 were two Bold Class 140 ton, 116 foot craft; Bold Pioneer and Bold Path Finder. These larger craft with two 4.5" guns and four 21" torpedoes, were powered by novel machinery for the time. Although initially fitted with captured Mercedes diesel engines, each was eventually fitted with two Vickers gas turbine engines and with the two Diesels, giving a speed of 40 knots. Nineteen Dark Class were ordered, built with metal frames with wooden hulls, and each powered with two Napier Deltic engines; eventually eighteen were commissioned.

Following the Admiralty decision in 1957 to take nearly all fast patrol boats out of commission, nine of these new Dark class were to be laid-up. However, on 20 December 1960 the Admiralty stated that the Coastal Forces were not being completely abandoned and a nucleus were to be kept alive so that the art would not be lost and in order to provide the foundations on which the Coastal Forces could be rapidly expanded if needed. A special boat squadron was nominated with two new Brave class and one Bold class, with nine of the Bold class being nominated to be in operational reserve.

Throughout the late fifties and early sixties, the Bold class, Gay class and the remainder of the Darks were steadily decommissioned. The Brave Class, *Brave Borderer*, launched 7 January 1958 and *Brave Swordsman*, launched 22 May 1958, ran from HMS Vernon, following the decommissioning of HMS Hornet in 1957. These Brave class were equipped to operate as either Motor Gunboats or Motor Torpedo Boats, with an impressive armament of two 40mm Bofors and two 21" side-launched torpedoes. Their three Bristol Marine Proteus gas turbine engines, originally manufactured for use with aircraft, and three shafts gave the boats an impressive speed of 50 knots. The boats were



designed for offensive operations against enemy warships and merchant ships in coastal waters during the Cold War. However, by 1962 both boats were playing a vital role in the Fishery Protection Squadron where their speed gave a greater degree of surprise where poaching was taking place.

Throughout this period, Coastal Forces were used in a NATO role of protecting the northern shores of Norway and particularly in Cold War clandestine operations. The landing of British agents in Soviet territories, under the name of Operation Jungle, lasted for a period of ten years.

HMS Hornet decommissioned in 1957, thus ending a long tradition on that site. There had been a base for CMBs in Haslar Creek during the First World War and until 1921. HMS Hornet was named in 1925 and initially commissioned in January 1926, temporarily closing in 1934 to be re-commissioned for the Second World War on the 20 December 1939. During the war years, HMS Hornet and the adjacent Haslar Gunboat Yard, provided maintenance and logistic support for Coastal Forces craft and it became familiar territory to many who served in Coastal Forces.

Although in essence Coastal Forces ceased in the late 1950s, small elements of form of naval warfare continued both with the Braves and then Fast Patrol Boats, termed FPBs. FPBs, *HMS Cutlass*, *Sabre* and *Scimitar*, were introduced into service in late 1969 and early 1970 to operate as training craft under the command of Flag Officer Sea Training at Portland. A development on the Brave class, FPBs went into commission in early 1971, with no armament, and were specifically designed for giving fleet practice in countering fast missile carrying vessels during the cold war period. These boats, manned by two officers and ten ratings, were 100 foot in length with a beam of 26 foot and a displacement of 100tons. Their two Gas Turbine engines gave a speed of 40 Knots and space was left for a third engine, which although never fitted, would have given increased the speed to 60 knots.

What was lost from the service with the cessation of Coastal Forces was arguably the finest vehicle for giving both officers and men early responsibility and the chance to develop their personal attributes and skills without undue or oppressive oversight. This was not just an opportunity for young men to do as they wished without supervision. Ample evidence exists to indicate that the sense of responsibility which they felt towards each other and to their small unit as a whole, produced an early maturity which was visible both during and after the war. This opportunity for self-development existed equally for the most junior member of the crew through to the Commanding Officer. In alternative circumstances, which the vast number of their contemporaries would find themselves throughout the service, these Coastal Forces officers and men would have been relatively small cogs in a much larger, less personal organisations. It is easy to see why those in Coastal Forces were largely volunteers for this form of service and, once there, most reluctant to revert to main stream naval activity. A comparison can be drawn to the submarine service in today's navy. This service is largely manned by volunteers and is renowned for having a very professional environment in which men mature and develop quickly. Alas, the loss of diesel submarines and the diminishing size of the submarine fleet reduces these opportunities within the modern navy.

However, with almost a degree of acknowledgement to the role of the small craft in the development of



the individual, the Royal Navy currently operates a squadron of Archer class, P2000 craft. These small craft of 49 Tons displacement and 68' length, achieve a speed 22 to 25 knots with their two diesel engines. They were ordered in 1985 and the 16 craft steadily entered service through the late 1980s. Their purpose was initially for the training of Royal Naval Reserve personnel but it quickly became apparent that they were to be greatly underused. Since the early 1990s they have been put to very effective use in the training of the many students undertaking degrees on naval sponsorships at the Universities through the UK, principally those that are suitably located close to the coast.

The Legacy

The history of Coastal Forces is being preserved by the **Coastal Forces Heritage Trust (CFHT)**, resident at the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth. The Trust was formed some eight years ago by a number of the officers and men who served in Coastal Forces during the war and its activities are diverse. The Trust's principal aim is to establish a permanent exhibition as part of the next stage development of the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Plans for this are well advanced and the development will bring to the Museum a major comprehensive display of 20th Century naval history. In addition, the Trust owns or supports several Second World War Coastal Forces craft including MGB 60, which is a 70-foot British Power Boat currently under restoration at the Oulton Broad, Lowestoft.

The Trust operates the 72-foot Harbour Defence Motor Launch (HDML1387), which, after the war, remained in commission in the Royal Navy as the Inshore Survey Vessel, HMS Medusa. She is still operational and at sea during the summer months training young people in maritime skills and flying the flag for the Trust. The Trust is associated with and supports MTB 102, the World War II 68-foot Vosper prototype, designed by Peter Du Cane. This boat is currently based at Ipswich and is also still operating at sea.

Most importantly, the Trust provides the focus for an extremely strong veterans association whose annual gathering still attracts some 400 members. The Remembrance Sunday service takes place at the Coastal Forces Memorial at The Hornet Sailing Centre, the site of the Coastal Forces base, HMS Hornet. Despite this branch of the Service virtually ceasing at the end of the war, and certainly by 1957 with the closing of HMS Hornet, interest in the wartime activities remains extremely strong. Enquiries about individuals and events come from all parts of the world and requests for literary contributions and support for media programmes are in steady demand.