

COPP HEROES NEWS 1

NOVEMBER 2011

Welcome to the first of our COPP Heroes newsletters, through which we aim to keep you informed of the latest news on the COPP Heroes Memorial project. Progress has been steady, but for reasons outside our control, we can't as yet announce a completion date.

We continue to find new friends and re-unite old comrades, while the interest we are getting from COPP families is really encouraging. Ian Piper, the generous donor of the central block of granite, has commenced work on trimming the stone and preparing the central Combined Operations badge. Early in September I visited the quarry with COPPist Jim Booth, to meet Ian and view progress.

We also met Lieut. Col. Dick Brown, who is in charge of the 24 Commando Regt. Royal Engineers' mission to transport the stone from Cornwall to Hayling Island. Jim Booth approached them because he knew the Royal Engineers had made up a large proportion of COPP volunteers. Dick Brown's men have reconnoitred the quarry and the memorial location on Hayling, and were delighted to offer their help, for when we make the big move from the Cornish quarry to the memorial site on the seafront.



We intend that the memorial will ultimately be the central element in our Hayling WW2 heritage trail, along the south of the island, and then part of the proposed Europe-wide Liberation Trail. This would feature: 1. Construction of parts of the Mulberry Harbour at the Ferry. 2. The AA gun site at Sinah. 3. The COPP Memorial. 4. Hayling's contribution to landing craft training and repairs, and as the location of the Fabius 2 rehearsal for the D-Day landings.

The COPP Heroes Memorial Fund is attracting good support, We are still working hard at fund-raising, and are conscious of the need to reach our objective during 2012. There have been some very generous donations, especially from COPPists and other servicemen and their relatives, and we are now well over halfway towards achieving our target of £30,000+.



However, the sooner we get there, the sooner we can complete the memorial, so we would dearly love to meet a 'fairy godmother' or even godfather, who might help us along the way,

We would be most grateful for suggestions and help with funding, and raising the profile of the COPP Heroes Memorial project.



Our COPP Heroes website, together with national press coverage has prompted three further surviving members of the COPP unit; David Owen, Peter Palmer and John Ashford to get in touch with us. All three have some great tales to tell, which we will soon be including on the website.

David Owen joined the army in 1941, and trained as a P.E. instructor, before volunteering for the commandos. While training in Scotland he was recruited to COPP. David tells us he was told that they would be involved in small boat work but says "I thought we would be paddling up and down rivers, not battling with 40' ocean waves!"

Peter Palmer is quite unique in being with the unit from day one, right up until the end of the war. As a very young seaman Peter was surprised to learn he had volunteered for COPP as a result of raising his hand, when his group of trainees were asked if anyone present could swim! We all know the old saying about volunteering, but the young Peter was certainly taken unawares. He served with Rollo Mangnall late in 1942 on the the early 'Party Inhuman' North African sortie. Rollo's son Phillip Mangnall was naturally delighted to receive copies of Peter's photographs featuring his father. Peter's CO in COPP 4 at the time, was Neville McHarg, and he has also been able to tell McHarg's daughter Mary about her father's time in the Mediterranean.



John Ashford who was a Royal Engineers captain, came to COPP late in the war, but knew Jim Booth, when both served in the Far East. It's particularly rewarding for us when we can put old comrades back in touch with each other. Equally important from our point of view, they have all been able to let us have photographs of their time in COPP, and we have been able to share these with the families of other COPPists, like for instance Sue Barker. [see right]

Robert Smith too has supplied some exceptional pieces from the collection of his late father Bob Smith, who with his partner Lieutenant D. Brand, completed the epic 75 mile canoe paddle back from Sicily to base in Malta early in 1943.

Personal records, documents and photographs are invaluable to us as we try to preserve the story of COPP for evermore in our COPP Heroes archive.

Anecdotes are vital, but in today's televisual world so are images. So come on all you COPP families, please dig out those precious photographs, and help us create the definitive record, so that the COPP volunteers will all be remembered and celebrated for years to come.



Far left: David Owen
Centre: Peter Palmer
Left: John Ashford reads all about it!

Sue Barker is the daughter of Robin Harbud and Evelyn Cross, both members of COPP who met on Hayling Island in 1943. Sue and her husband Neil have been very kind in providing us with a great number of documents, photographs and memories of COPP personnel based at HISC during the war years.

Robin Walton