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## Countess unveils memorial to wartime secret heroes

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2 Oct 12

**An elite group of men who paved the way for success on D-Day have been honoured with an imposing monument on Hayling Island in Hampshire.**



Countess Mountbatten of Burma speaks at the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties memorial stone dedication ceremony on Hayling Island

[Picture: Leading Airman (Photographer) Dan Rosenbaum, Crown Copyright/MOD 2012]

Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, and Major General Ed Davis, Commandant General Royal Marines and Commander Amphibious Forces, led tributes to veterans of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPP), who carried out top-secret missions in the run-up to the Normandy invasion, after the unveiling of a granite monument by Countess Mountbatten of Burma on Friday, 28 September.

The COPP played an instrumental role in saving thousands of lives during the Second World War by reaching enemy-occupied invasion sites and recovering surveillance information.

The forerunners of the Special Boat Service, the Special Forces arm of the Royal Marines, they marked out the navigation channels for landing sites used on D-Day in 1944.

Speaking at the monument site, General Richards said:



Veteran members of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties arrive on Hayling Island  
[Picture: Leading Airman (Photographer) Dan Rosenbaum, Crown Copyright/MOD 2012]

"As an organisation they were unique - taking risks in paddling miles from the relative safety of a ship or submarine to the dangers of enemy-occupied territory in two-man teams, they proved their courage time and again.

"Their exploits were relatively secret at the time but now should be remembered with great pride."

Based at Hayling Island Sailing Club, the unit was created by the Countess's father, Lord Louis Mountbatten, in 1943 after the failed Dieppe raid the previous year.

Perhaps the COPP's most famous and important mission was carried out on the last day of 1943, when a team was sent to recce a beach in Normandy, taking samples back to the UK for experts to analyse. The sands they surveyed would become Gold Beach, the central beach of the invasion area, on D-Day.



General Sir David Richards leads a salute to the fallen of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties on Hayling Island  
[Picture: Leading Airman (Photographer) Dan Rosenbaum, Crown Copyright/MOD 2012]

While D-Day is a famous wartime episode, the work of the COPPists, as COPP members were known, has been a secret limited to only a small band of military historians and the dwindling number of veterans. The two-metre-high granite monument on Hayling Island now stands to pay tribute to their work and remind countless future generations of their heroic contribution.

Speaking at the unveiling, Countess Mountbatten said:

"It's a really wonderful occasion, with a large crowd marking the bravery and courage of the COPPists.

"It's nearly 70 years ago now that I was a Wren serving along the coast on the River Hamble in HMS Tormentor," she recalled.

"We had some COPPists around, but nobody liked to talk too much about them; such was the secrecy and importance of their work."

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