

TIMELINE

March 1942 – Lt Commander Nigel Willmott carries out a recce of Rhodes with SBS canoe expert Major ‘Jumbo’ Courtney

Sept 1942 – Willmott forms a team of Navy navigators and SBS commados to recce North African beaches

Nov 1942 – Vital lessons are learned about beach reconnaissance during Operation Torch as Vichy French forces surrender

Dec 1942 – Combined Operations under Lord Mountbatten give order to Willmott to create COPP officially at Hayling Island Sailing Club (HISC)

Jan 1943 – with less than a month’s training the first two teams – COPP 3 & 4 are sent to Algiers and Malta to prepare for the invasion of Sicily – Operation Husky

Feb 1943 – three more teams of 12 begin training at HISC after it is officially commissioned as COPP HQ and depot

June 1943 – after earlier losses COPP 5 & 6 are sent to survey more Sicily beaches before July’s invasion

Sept 1943 – COPP 5 take part in Salerno invasion in Italy

Oct 1943 – COPP 7 are first team sent to India to prepare for Burma campaign followed by COPP 8

Nov 1943 – COPP begin training on X-craft at Scotland’s Loch Striven

Dec 1943 – COPP 2 takes soundings off Normandy coast in search for sites for Mulberry harbours needed for D-day

Dec 31, 1943 – Operation KJH COPP 1 surveys Gold Beach with COPP 6 as back-up

Jan 1944 – COPP 1 return to Normandy to recce Omaha and Utah Beaches while COPP 10 assist Anzio landings in Italy

June 1944 – COPP 1, 6 and 9 take part in Operation Overlord

July-Dec 1944 – COPP 7, 8 continue missions in Asia, joined by COPP 1, 3, 4 and 9 who prepare for Rangoon offensive

Jan-March 1945 – COPP 3 survey numerous beaches in Burma and Thailand

March 1945 – COPP 5 take part in Rhine crossings – Operations Plunder and Varsity

June 1945 – COPP 3 survey Morib beaches in Malaya for
Operation Confidence
Sept 9, 1945 – Operation Zipper Malaya

FACTFILE

In total, just over 200 men served in COPP between 1943 and 1945, from Europe and the Med to the Far East, helping to liberate Burma, Malaya, Thailand and Indonesia from Japanese forces.

Between them they earned some 90 military medals and mentions in despatches for their incredible bravery.

Seven COPPists would lose their lives in waters off Sicily alone between February and July 1943, while another three would perish in Asia, one while travelling to his base by train in India.

In 2012, Countess Mountbatten unveiled a memorial to COPP on Hayling Island seafront,.

In 2015 Prince Charles, who was patron of the memorial appeal fund, met the last remaining COPPists at a special service at the memorial.

Jim Booth, who took part in D-Day on board X-23, and served in the Far East in COPP 9, was the last known member of COPP to pass away, aged 101.