

COPP HEROES NEWS 7

JULY 2014

DAN SNOW HONOURS THE COPP HEROES

Wednesday 21st May was a big day for Hayling Island, when we held the final event to celebrate the heroism of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties Unit. Many hundreds turned up to help commemorate the achievements of Hayling's wonderful WWII COPP unit, marking the 70th anniversary of D-Day, & their vital contribution to its success.



Dan Snow



Speeches were led by the COPP Memorial Association president Lord Richards of Herstmonceux, [former Chief of Defence Staff Sir David Richards], followed by wreath-laying and unveiling of a dedicated COPP seat by the Hon Timothy Knatchbull, the grandson of Lord Louis Mountbatten.

The celebration was presented by Sally Taylor of BBC South Today, and we were absolutely delighted to welcome TV historian Dan Snow, who delivered the keynote address. Dan commented on how honoured he felt to be asked to give the background to the day's event, and the bravery of Hayling's COPP Heroes.

The service was conducted by the Revd Major Anthony Ingham, Padre of 47 Regiment R.A. supported by the Hayling College choir, while the brass ensemble Queen's Minden Military Band provided fine musical support.

The Three Belles vocal group entertained us wonderfully with songs from the times, and the men and women of our local 47 Regiment Royal Artillery, who had done such a great job for us 18 months ago helped us once more on the big day. 3 Platoon Hayling Army Cadets assisted, and senior students from Hayling College provided great backing to the hymn and national anthem.

There was a spectacular display of military colours which gave real gravity the Last Post and Reveille, so ably played by our Royal Marines bugler, Steve Taylor.

May 21st 2014



Hon. Timothy Knatchbull



Sally Taylor



Lord Richards of Herstmonceux



Polly Mortimer

As ever, we enjoyed fine weather. It is quite remarkable that on every public occasion, from the delivery of the granite centre-piece by 24 Regiment Royal Engineers in July 2012, to its lift into place by Marsh Plant, the Memorial's dedication in September 2012 and our final ceremony, that it has always been fine weather. It does seem that someone has been watching over us.

Keynote speaker Dan Snow



47 Regt RA Padre, Major Tony Ingham



RSM Russell Leigh



Sadly over the past few months we have lost several more of our COPP veterans, so this was probably our last opportunity ever to **celebrate their great courage**. Three were present on the 21st May, John Bowden, John Ashford and Roger Gilbert, but Peter Palmer was too unwell to travel, while unfortunately Jim Booth was taken ill on the evening before.

Jim's granddaughter Polly Mortimer, bravely stepped in at the very last minute to deliver his address with great aplomb. She was quite splendid, like a true professional, commenting later that it was the most wonderful day of her life.

I have had many notes and calls to say how pleased relatives and friends were to meet and renew friendships with other COPP people, all saying how much they enjoyed the chance to talk and swap tales over lunch at the Sailing Club after the ceremony on the Common. Peter Wild's wife Muriel was there, having come all the way from Scotland!

Top: Two of the 47 Regiment gunners who did such a fine job on the day.

Centre left: Sally Taylor meets Muriel Wild

Centre right: RM Bugler Steve Taylor

Bottom: The assembled standard bearers





The Three Belles proved a great hit with everyone, young and old, and we were particularly pleased to have so many young people with us to celebrate the occasion. Together with the Mayor of Havant we bought a small silver salver which was later presented to our major donor Ian Piper, who celebrated with a kiss.





The morning's programme at the Memorial was completed when the Hon. Timothy Knatchbull formally unveiled the COPP Memorial seat, a memorable act to mark the occasion and honour the men of Hayling's COPP unit.

The memorial seat was specially created by Streetmaster [Swansea] for COPP and Havant Borough Council, who donated & installed it, to provide a nice resting point to contemplate the Memorial.



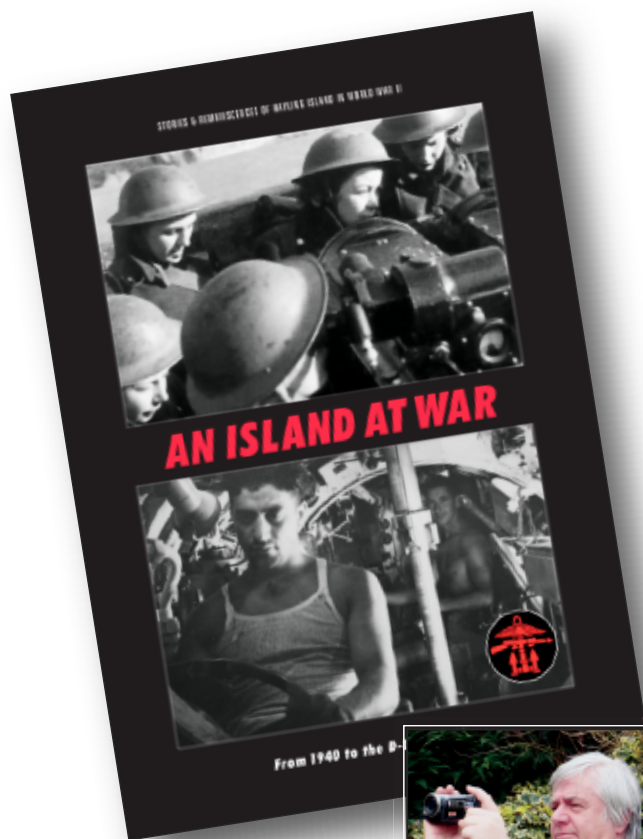
Left: The Memorial seat gets its first occupants:

Back: Polly Mortimer, Robin Walton, Lord Richards, Sally Taylor and Dan Snow.

Front: John Bowden, John Ashford and Roger Gilbert.

Douglas Sharp tells Sally Taylor about the creation of the seat.





£17.99



My new book 'An Island at War', is proving to be very popular. It has 124 A4 pages and is full of stories, photographs and anecdotes telling much of the COPP story, while also putting it into context at the heart of Hayling's huge contribution to the WW2 war effort. As I point out, the most telling impression on the home front is of the massive input from the ladies, and how very young they all were at the time, many just teenagers.

We can look back with pride on what has been achieved over the past five years. It has never been easy, and achieving financial security has been a constant worry, which is sad in such a comparably well off community.

However, there is an outstanding opportunity here to capitalise on our work to date. I have in the past commented on the great number of museums and WW2 centres across Normandy, while we only have the Portsmouth D-Day Museum, which has very little coverage of Hayling and especially of COPP.

I am proud too that we have the very first WW2 Heritage Trail in the entire UK here on Hayling. Ian Murray of 'The Inn on the Beach' tells me he now gets small groups in to view the COPP Gallery sited in his premises. Tourism has great potential for the Island, but it seems our Tourist Office may be closing on Sundays, which seems short-sighted especially during the Summer months.

A bit of fun to finish. My esteemed COPP associate Mike Beel [centre left] took many of these photographs, and modified this one of my wife talking to Dan Snow. [far left]

I gather Dan quite liked it.

Robin Walton July 5th 2014



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