

## Researching RN Beach Commandos from World War Two

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### Introduction

The main problem with researching former members of the RN Beach Commandos is that nearly all the records at their HQ at HMS Armadillo were destroyed shortly after the war finished.

In addition normally all postings of RN personnel are entered on a service person's personal record but for those who volunteered or were drafted to Combined Operations, often all that appears is HMS Quebec and later HMS Copra regardless of which unit of the many units that were in Combined Operations they were in, including the RN Beach Commandos.

Finally rather than showing on a record the RN Beach Commando unit, often what appears is the [\(Assault\) Force the RNBC](#) was part of or the [Naval Party Number](#) the RNBC was allocated at that time.

HMS Quebec was part of No.1 Combined Operations Training Centre at Inveraray; HMS Quebec was commissioned on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1940 and paid off on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1946.

HMS Copra was the Combined Operations Pay and Drafting Office, originally based at Chelsea Court SW7, commissioned on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1943 and paid off on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1946. COPRA was an abbreviation for Combined Operations Personnel Records & Accounts. The Drafting Section moved to Southend before relocating to Largs by the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1945 whilst the Pay Section had moved to Largs by August 1944. The personnel themselves would have been serving elsewhere. COPRA supported personnel from all three services involved in combined operations in North Africa, Italy, Western Europe and SEAC (South East Asia Command).

However with some research and luck it is possible to identify when and which unit or units a former RN Commando from the Second World War was in and therefore which operations they took part in and in some cases it is even possible to locate the beaches, where they landed.

See <http://www.relaysystem.co.uk/id3.html> for more information.

### Preliminaries

1 Get in touch with anyone who may know anything about the family member's military service before, during and after the war including other family members, their friends, groups or associations they were in. Compile notes on what they know or may have heard or been told and begin a **timeline** of your family member's war service. Be prepared for some information to be contradictory.

2 Collate from the above, originals or copies of any photographs service documents letters, certificates noting any service numbers and newspaper cuttings pertaining to your family members service.

If you can find photos of your family member from their service time this will be very helpful, remember that there may be something written on the back of photos and that people often used to have more than one photo stored in their picture frames.

Group photos are particularly useful as members of the group may appear in other photos either on the Royal Naval Commandos 1942-45 History Facebook Group or on the Commando Veterans Website. <http://gallery.commandoveterans.org/cdoGallery/v/units/rn+cdos/>

3 Collate or obtain photos of any items or objects that belonged or were acquired by the family member during their war service for example medals, bits of uniform especially badges, naval kit bag or service suitcase as these may have unit details written or painted on them. Any mementos from their wartime service may be a useful clue.

Their medals should give an indication of where they served, <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/7863/wwiiribbons.pdf>

If you do not have their medals you can still find out what he was awarded from official sources, see below.

If you do not have all the family members military records you should obtain permission from the family member's 'Next of Kin' and apply for them from the appropriate office, see Research guide B3: The Royal Navy: Sources for enquiries, <http://www.rmg.co.uk/researchers/library/research-guides/the-royal-navy/research-guide-b3-the-royal-navy-sources-for-enquiries>

## Useful Websites when researching the RN Commandos

### Facebook

If you are a member of Facebook you should consider joining the group Royal Naval Commandos 1942-1945 History Group, <https://www.facebook.com/login.php?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fgroups%2F170022043011422%2F>

If you are not a member of Facebook but wish to join the group I suggest you just create a basic profile with the minimum of information necessary and maximum of security.

### Abbreviations

An online copy of the Admiralty Fleet Order, April 1944 – Abbreviated titles and other abbreviations in general use.

<http://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2152.pdf>

### The London Gazette

This site is especially useful if you are researching someone that was decorated or mentioned in despatches (MID).

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

### The National Archives

You can look or obtain original records from the National Archives such as the History of Naval Beach Control Parties (formerly Royal Naval Beach Commandos)

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/record?catid=5127331&catln=6>

[Royal Naval Beach Commandos 1942 -1945](#)

## **Imperial War Museum**

Imperial War Museum, London, Collections - A. Cecil Hamshire collection, author of the Beachhead Commandos

A list of the RN Commando related papers in Box 2 of IWM Collection A C Hampshire, ref 83/34/20

## **National Museum of the Royal Navy**

Research Visits <http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/research-visits>

NMRN Enquiry Service <http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/make-enquiry>

On the Royal Marines Museum website, they have a genealogy page where there are three links for pdfs reference finding and deciphering service records.

<http://www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk/research-and-collections/genealogy>

## **Researching the Fallen**

### **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

Commemorate the 1,700,000 men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the two world wars. The cemeteries, burial plots and memorials are a lasting tribute to those who died in some 154 countries across the world. Their Register records details of Commonwealth war dead so that graves or names on memorials can be located.

<http://www.cwgc.org/>

### **The War Graves Photographic Project**

The original aim of The War Graves Photographic Project was to photograph every war grave, individual memorial, Ministry of Defense grave, and family memorial of serving military personnel from WWI to the present day.

<http://www.twgpp.org/>

## **Researching Officers**

On [the website](#) there is an account of each commando from the History of Naval Beach Control Parties (formerly Royal Naval Beach Commandos) at the [National Archives](#). These are located at the beginning of the section allocated to each RN Beach Commando unit. Included in the account are a list of the officers who served in that unit however these accounts were written between the 18th of March and the 1st of April 1946 after the 'great spring clean' so there maybe a few anomalies in the accounts and the lists of officers are not necessarily one hundred per cent correct or even complete.

### **The Navy List – Corrected to the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1944**

<https://archive.org/details/navylistjan1945v2grea>

**World War II fighting units**, has pages on Royal Navy, Royal Navy Reserve and Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve officers

[http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RN\\_officersA.html](http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RN_officersA.html)

## **Researching Ratings**

Lists of the ratings in the RN Beach Commandos are rare and come from a number of sources.

[Nan RN Beach Commando list](#), probably compiled by members of the RN Commando Association

Nominal of Personnel in Major Landing Craft returning to the United Kingdom, including M1 Beach Party, M2 Beach Party, M3 Beach Party, RNBSS7 and RNBSS9 as of the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1943 [http://www.relaysystem.co.uk/KSB\\_RNBC\\_M-1.pdf](http://www.relaysystem.co.uk/KSB_RNBC_M-1.pdf)

Nominal of Combined Operations Personnel on passage back to the United Kingdom including four members of M Beach Party as of the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1943

[http://www.relaysystem.co.uk/KSB\\_RNBC\\_M-2.pdf](http://www.relaysystem.co.uk/KSB_RNBC_M-2.pdf)

William RCN Beach Commando, Nominal List April 19th 1944

### Miscellaneous

[Commando Veterans Association](#)

[Combined Operations Website](#)

Combined Operations Website – [Combined Operations Staff Notebook](#)

[Combined Operations Pamphlet No.17 RN Beach Commandos](#)

[RAF Beach Units](#)

[Special Forces Roll of Honour - RN Commandos](#)