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The X-craft secret to D-Day revealed: Submariners who led invasion after spending FIVE DAYS on seabed just yards from Nazi guns

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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A crack team of ten commandos who lead a secret underwater mission ahead of the D-Day invasions are to be honoured for the first time.

The ten elite troops spent five days underwater in tiny crafts as they lay in wait on the seabed ahead before the invasion of Normandy in 1944.

Their task was to spy from their 'X-crafts' on Nazi troops before guiding Allied forces across the treacherous rocky shoreline.



Underwater endurance: Former commando Jim Booth, 90, holds a map showing how he spearheaded Normandy landings



Navy Lieutenant: Mr Booth when he first joined the forces

Despite cramped conditions and a lack of oxygen, the ten commandos shone beacons across the sea to complete one of the most pivotal invasions of the Second World War.

The troops from the Combined Operations Pilotage and Reconnaissance Parties will now be honoured with a granite memorial donated by Prince Charles on Hayling Island, Hampshire, where they were based.

One of the last surviving troops, Jim Booth, 90, helped to guide Allied landing crafts to Sword beach instead of drifting onto jagged rocks.

'When we were under way beneath the water, I was either on the steering wheel or the periscope,' Jim, from Taunton, Somerset, told the Daily Mirror.

'In those days there was no satnav and we had to do navigation the old-fashioned way to find our destination. We took charts, pictures, anything we could lay our hands on. When we arrived we went up the beach a couple of times to take bearings.'

The Normandy Landings on June 6 1944, also known as D-Day, saw 24,000 British, American, Canadian and Free French troops begin an airborne assault shortly after midnight.

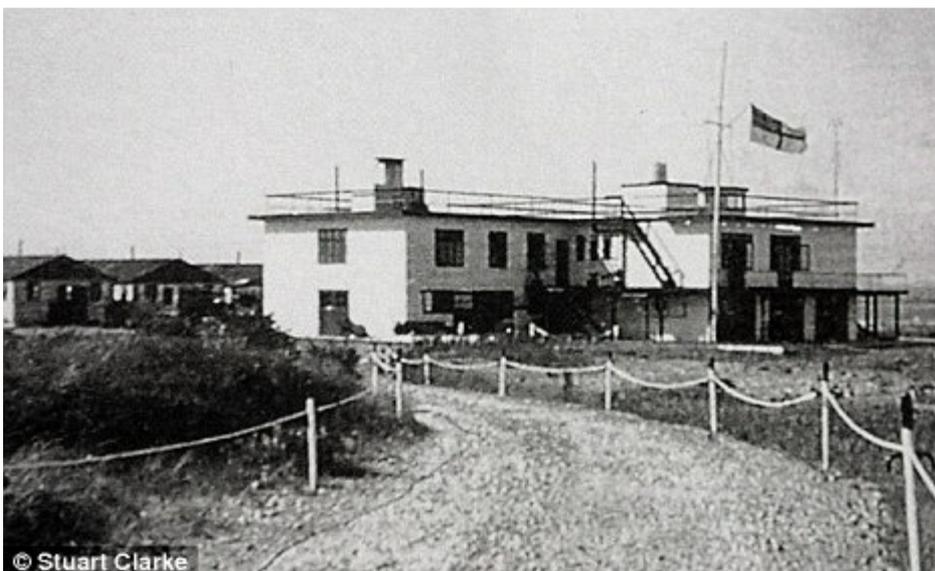
This was followed by the war's biggest ever amphibious landing of Allied infantry and armoured divisions at 6:30 AM with 160,000 troops.

The secret mission of the two five-man crews submerged in their tiny crafts had remained virtually unknown until now.

The men could not stand in the tiny submarines, which relied on battery-power when under the water.



Brave: A commando from the x-craft stands up to survey the shore as it surfaces to lead Allied troops in the D-Day invasion



Top secret: The Combined Operations Pilotage Parties base at Hayling Island, Hampshire from which the mission was planned

It was even feared that oxygen was running out inside the submarines, which measured just 51ft long and 6ft wide.

They turned off their radars to avoid detection by the Germans and dropped to the seabed around 30ft below the surface.

The men survived on rations of tea and baked beans or soup as they waited. They slept one at a time in four-hour rotations in the battery compartment with the bed 'still warm' from the person before them.

Jim said they talked about 'beer and women' and that they were a close team that knew each other well.

Incredibly, the crafts would surface each evening to listen in to the BBC 10 o'clock news for a secret codeword contained in the broadcasts that signalled the invasion was to begin.

One secret message came through to let the men know that the mission had been delayed for 24 hours - raising fears that the men would run out of air.



Attack: Troops look out from the deck of HMS Warapite during the Normandy Landings in 1944



Invasion: Allied forces scramble across the shore at Sword Beach after the Nazis were battered with an aerial attack

'At times like this we were expected to take a nap to use less oxygen. At night when the boat surfaced we could walk about on deck a bit to get some fresh air,' added.

Jim said that the day before the invasions they used a periscope to see the Germans playing football on the shores. They had a message to prepare for the invasion and rose to the surface at 4am.

'Then we had this spectacular experience as this incredible mass of planes arrived which bombed the beach in advance. After the beach was pulverised, the planes suddenly stopped coming. Along came the first wave of landing craft. It was dawn by then. They passed us, knowing they were going to hit the right beach, at the right depth.'

Jim climbed into a fold-away canoe and shined a beacon out to sea which allowed the flotilla of Allied landing craft to reach the shore and make the mission a success.



Tribute: An artist's impression of the granite memorial donated by Prince Charles to honour the submarine men on Hayling Island

American troops who did not have the same kind of guidance failed to find the correct route, with tanks having to be released into water that was too deep.

Jim has already been awarded Croix de Guerre French military medal. He will now be honoured alongside the handful of surviving members of the operation.

Prince Charles, whose uncle Lord Louis Mountbatten set up the men's unit, has agreed to be patron of a committee honouring the men.

He has also donated granite for the memorial which is due to be unveiled at a ceremony later this year.

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