

Lest we forget

What a little boy learned from D-Day.

Angus Rae, MB

I first heard George Santayana's warning "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" while I was in high school during the Second World War.

With June 2014 marking the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn for Scottish Independence, the 100th anniversary of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination (which sparked the First World War), and the 70th anniversary of D-Day (the greatest land invasion in history, which finally end the Second World War), we are reminded to heed this advice—especially given the current state of our society and the world.

Seventy years ago a little boy also learned a lesson from D-Day, which has stayed with him throughout his life.

For the third day running the heavens were ripped asunder by squadrons of Spitfires stationed nearby and heading south and east past London for the coast of Kent.

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The spring term of March 1944 was completed in a remote school deep in the English countryside to which the little boy and his brother had been sent in order to avoid the London Blitz, which had already shattered their home, fortunately without casualties. They knew this was the prelude to the long-awaited second front, the date of which was not then known.

By chance, there was an outbreak of mumps at the school and the little boy was affected. Those affected were forbidden to travel home by train when the term ended, lest they infect the troops—hundreds of whom were traveling to the coming fray. A number of his classmates went home by horse and cart, but the boy's new home was many miles away and this was not an option for him.

Petrol was strictly rationed at that time, but his father, a radiologist, was allowed a small amount to provide services to hospitals some distance from the school.

"No problem," said the boy. "You have enough petrol to pick me up; it's only a few miles."

"No," said his father, "to do that would be to deceive the troops, many

of whom will give their lives in the belief that the whole country is supporting them by making their own sacrifices, however small. Minor as it may be, to remain at school will be your contribution."

"Nobody would know," said the little boy.

"I would know," his father answered, "and so would you. And what if we lose the war? Would you want to live the rest of your life knowing that you, by your deceit—however small—contributed to the disaster? Deceit is never justified and will always be exposed."

The little boy remained at school and even played rugby, happily without the dread complication exercise may cause in those with mumps.

D-Day came 9 weeks later at 6:30 a.m. on 6 June 1944. Fortunately, despite many casualties, the Allies won, and, however small his contribution had been, the boy felt proud of it.

If it had been otherwise, and the Allies had lost, he cannot imagine how his deceit, however minor, would have affected his life and career. **BCMJ**