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Thoughts from Staff College.....the sixteenth in our series of Faculty blogs

Don't Panic!

Brigadier Ian Huntley OBE

Thetford, in Norfolk, sticks in my mind for three reasons. First, because it was the location where many of the scenes for Dad's Army were filmed. Second, because many years ago, I remember shivering on the local military training area in a flimsy uniform and floppy hat as we conducted jungle training in the snow. And third, because it was the birthplace of Thomas Paine. Now, I have to confess that I know more about Captain Mainwaring than I do about Citizen Paine. However, I did vaguely remember that he had written a treatise about *The Rights of Man* – Paine, that is.

So, a recent visit to the town gave me the opportunity to learn a little bit more. The golden statue of him in front of the Town Hall describes him as '*World Citizen, Englishman by birth, French citizen by decree, American by adoption*'. Paine was intimately involved in the American Revolution on, what might be termed, the wrong (albeit winning) side. His pamphlet: *The American Crisis Number 1*, published on 19 December 1776, when George Washington's army was on the verge of collapse, so moved Washington that he ordered it read to all his troops. It began with the assertion that: '*These are the times that try men's souls*' and went on to observe that: '*What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: It is dearness only that gives everything its value.*'

It was while engaged with another revolution, this time the French one, that Paine wrote his most famous work: *Rights of Man* (published on 17 February 1792). Although it started as a defence of the French revolution, Paine went on to outline a plan for popular education, relief of the poor, pensions for aged people, and public works for the unemployed, all to be financed by levying a progressive income tax. Clearly, these were radical ideas and Paine was found guilty *in absentia* of seditious libel by the British Government. Paine died in New York in 1809. His obituary in most US newspapers read: '*He had lived long, did some good and much harm*'. It was only more than a century later that Paine's reputation was restored, and he was hailed as '*the English Voltaire*'.

This got me thinking about legacies: how people are remembered and how opinions about you change; not just when you die but when you leave a job or move from one stage of life to another. Of course, one cannot have any control over how you are perceived by others, so aiming to leave behind a burnished reputation or an admired legacy is sheer folly (*Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!*[1]).

On one side of Paine's statue is carved the following advice: *It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be faithful to himself.* Wise words indeed. At least if you are faithful to your own beliefs and standards you can be content and let people judge you as they will. I would suggest that anyone who doubts the wisdom of this sentiment would surely qualify for the epithet issued by that other statuesque Thetford icon: '*You stupid boy*!'

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[1] Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley