

## Impact Statement

Tina Chen, Grade 8.

***Playing Dumb***, 2023.

Digital art, 36 x 24 inches.

Cougar Mountain Middle School, Issaquah, WA

Unsung Hero: Douglas Hegdahl

Scrolling through all the names, not recognizing most of them. but the “incredibly stupid one” caught my eyes. Why incredibly stupid? aren’t all heroes great and smart? But after reading and searching about this unsung hero, I realized he is not stupid, in fact the smartest. I was struck by his clever use of deception to gather intelligence and help plan an escape and was inspired by his unwavering resilience and determination to survive despite the difficult conditions he faced in captivity. Douglas Hegdahl, a former United States Navy sailor who is known for his incredible resilience and ingenuity during his time as a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War.

During my research, I discovered Douglas Hegdahl's toughness, bravery, and cleverness. Hegdahl gave his captors incorrect information about his ship and his responsibilities by pretending to be an uneducated, illiterate sailor. His captors eventually gave up on teaching him how to read and write. That’s also why Douglas was known as “the incredibly stupid one.” Hegdahl never lost his spirit or his will, despite the mental and physical toll of his captivity. The “no go home early” pact shocked me, how all the soldiers agreed to stay and endure together. When Douglas Hegdahl is finally free from the torture and is free to go home, he chose to stay and endure the pain with the other soldiers, even though he was later commanded to go back and share valuable information, his spirit and braveness still shocked and inspired me. He endured the torture, isolation, and hunger for more than two years in the prison camp before becoming a hero to both his fellow inmates and the American people.

I struggled to think about what to draw about him, there are so many amazing things Douglas Hegdahl accomplished that it was difficult for me to decide, which one piece of paper is clearly not enough. But after all the reading, I had my idea. He once filled five army trucks’ gas tanks with dirt and leaves so they would not operate. As compared to other things he had done, this may not seem like a big deal, but thinking about the brutality he faced, he never lost hope or gave up. Instead, he did his best to help the US by taking actions like this. After doing the draft repeatedly, trying to include everything, my hand and my brain finally came to an agreement. I tried to focus on this event and made it the best I could, rather than trying to include everything. But I also included some small details like the broom which he was given the task of sweeping prison grounds.

Creating this art really affected me and made me think, like I said, when I first looked through the names, I could not recognize most of them, but they are just as important as any well-known heroes. After learning about Douglas Hegdahl, I also read about the other heroes, their stories are just as inspiring as Douglas. They should all be remembered and honored. Douglas Hegdahl's story of bravery and determination is one that will forever be remembered and cherished. the heroic journey of Douglas Hegdahl serves as a reminder to the resilience of the

American soldiers and the ability of the human spirit. He is a true hero, and we will always remember his bravery and selflessness.