

## Impact Statement

Dakota Gavin, Grade 12.

***Glorifica***, 2019.

Mixed media, 25 x 16 Inches.

Hawaii Baptist Academy, Honolulu, HI

Unsung Hero: Cher Ami

"We are along the road parallel to 276.4. Our own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heaven's sake stop it." - Major Charles White Whittlesey

More often than not, we as human beings with fears, doubts, and complex emotions will stand in the face of an adversity larger than ourselves and feel helpless. What is a man to do in the shadow of Goliath? Is there some higher calling that inspires him to fight tooth and nail to the bitter end? Does he reason with himself that surrender is the safest and therefore most beneficial option? Perhaps he is born with an animal instinct that tells him to press on against all odds.

Cher Ami, a French carrier pigeon within the ownership of the Lost Battalion, stood against the fears that mankind dwells upon and answered the call to action. Within her mind she had no feasible perception of her perilous circumstances. She did not know why or for whom she flew. Yet, through the roar of guns, smoke, and shrapnel, Cher Ami saved nearly 200 men at the eventual cost of her own life. Ever since I was young, I have possessed a great interest in World War 1. So naturally, when I looked through the list of pre-approved heroes, I recognized Cher Ami as a significant and heroic animal of the war.

To further expand my knowledge of her story and the subject of WW1 service animals in general, I researched the roles they played and heroic actions of specific animals in online published articles and books from the school library. While researching the historical significance and symbolism of doves and pigeons, I discovered that they hold a fairly substantial significance in the Bible, frequently being offered as sacrifices to God. The story of Cher Ami draws parallels in that her legacy is also story of sacrifice. As such, I've decided to interpret this piece, titled *Glorifica*, with a sense of religious divinity. The most compelling aspect of the piece is the large wings that rest upon the soldier releasing Cher Ami. The soldier depicted in this artwork, Major Whittlesey, played a significant role in sending off Cher Ami that fateful day. It should also be noted that the heroic actions of Whittlesey in leading his men against all odds largely contribute to his role in this piece. In a sense, Whittlesey can be seen a messenger of the Lord, as many angels are in the Bible, with Cher Ami being a divine sacrifice.

The Major's wings are positioned in such a way that they partially cover Cher Ami, in order to protect her during the perilous journey to the American lines. In contrast to Whittlesey's embossed wings and posture, his face is intentionally darkened and somewhat concealed. Viewers are only able to see the iconic round framed glasses he wears. The isolation is to communicate the notion that the unsung hero of this artwork is indeed Cher Ami. Cher Ami herself is meant to be the main focus of this piece. This is communicated with the intense accent lighting that converges on her. Cher Ami's position in the center of the piece also

communicates a sense of focus and importance. Her highlighted and outstretched wings serve to promote a sense of fearless ambition, contrasting the shadowed appearance of the Major and the figures in the background. Finally, viewers of this piece may observe soldiers standing at attention in the background. Their valiant postures convey courage and bravery in the face of uncertainty.

The soldier silhouettes slowly vanish into the distance, representing the 194 lives Cher Ami saved on October 4, 1918. From creating *Glorifica*, I realized that within our own struggles, sometimes we need to rely on hope and faith. I cannot fathom the sheer amount of terror that went through the minds of those young men on that day, but one can almost feel the sense of gratitude and relief they experienced from the heroic actions of Cher Ami. Through her heroic journey to friendly lines, I realized the importance of courage and commitment and the role it plays in our everyday lives. These virtues encourage us to keep on going when circumstances get tough. It is through Cher Ami and the Lost Battalion wherein we observe the relationship between faith and commitment. We endeavor to continue upon this path of hardship and struggle, knowing that in good faith our actions and virtue will see us through. To forward the story of Cher Ami to others, I wrote a devotional and shared it with Sophomores as they learned about the United States' role in WW1. I will be sharing with them both the story of Cher Ami and how the virtue of commitment plays into her story. Furthermore, although the decision has not yet been officially adopted as of yet, there are potential plans to introduce the Celebration of Unsung Heroes project as a research assignment for Freshmen. Hopefully they are inspired by the efforts of the Lowell Milken Center and myself to discover these Unsung Heroes. Though such events have long since passed, and poppies grow over the trench lines that littered the French countryside over 100 years ago, we must not forget the heroism of individuals that went above and beyond their country's calling. Cher Ami is but one of the millions who sacrificed everything for the sake of a world at peace. The legacy and unwavering courage of Cher Ami will continue to inspire brave-hearted individuals for decades to come, lest we forget.