



Impact Statement

Sue Lee, Grade 9

An Unwavering Heart, 2026

Watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 inches

Marlborough School, Los Angeles, CA

Unsung Hero: Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran

When war comes to mind, do we first think of the sacrifices made for our future? Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran is a soldier who does not give up on a core value: loyalty. He is a prime example of standing by one's own principles. During battle, Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran faced a much larger enemy force and was taken in by the North Vietnamese forces. Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran spent 13 years in captivity, refusing to turn on his beliefs and join the North Vietnamese troops. Because of this refusal, his time in captivity was mostly spent in solitary confinement. I chose Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran because of his unwavering heart and loyalty to his country, as it is admirable and can be seen as a symbol of resilience. One other reason that I chose his story is that it gives a deeper perspective on the human cost of the Vietnam War. I believe that more awareness should be raised about the cruelty and realities that real people have gone through to ensure the safety of many others. Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran has impacted many others through his unwavering loyalty to his country. One specific person that he impacted was a journalist whom he met when he was a second-year lieutenant. Amidst the fighting, the reporter came onto the site and happened to meet Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran in the middle of combat. During this encounter, Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran gave the reporter his bandana and said, "You civilian. You must not fight. You come anyway. You have the courage." Even though he was not a soldier. This seemingly small gesture left a big impact on the reporter, big enough that this bandana and his words are still remembered after their reunion, as Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran's talk was a symbol of kindness that lasted even two decades after this encounter.

I wanted to highlight the loyalty and persistence that Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran exemplified in his story through my artwork. My artwork shows his younger self in black and white and his current self in color as a way to portray his time and dedication as a soldier. I specifically included the book Vietnam's Forgotten Army, which sheds light on his sacrifice and bravery as a soldier, as soldiers are not fully recognized for the sacrifices that they make for others in war. Through my work overall, I wanted to emphasize Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran's story, as his sacrifices are things that should be known and not forgotten. In my work, I specifically used watercolors to paint his face with depth and vividness. Watercolor brought vividness to the future while also allowing for more solid colors of the past when I painted his younger self in black and white.

Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran's story is one that changed my perspective on sacrifices for war. It was one that really made me realize how harmful war was to everyone involved in it and the respect that we need to give to our veterans. I would like to share my artwork with many of my peers to spread awareness of Lt. Col. Hue Ngoc Tran's story.