



Impact Statement

Iryna Zlomynoha, Grade 11

La Galerie de Courage, 2026

Watercolor, ink on paper, 8.5 x 11.5 inches

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Unsung Hero: Noor Inayat Khan

Many of us imagine war heroes as brave warriors on the front lines, defending their country, often at the cost of their lives. While it is true in many cases, there are countless other heroes, whose stories often go unsung. They can be found amongst captains, generals, engineers, medics, public speakers, as well as secret agents, one of whom is Noor Inayat Khan, whose story I wish to share. The covert nature of their job makes them easy to overlook, so their achievements and deeds don't receive the attention they deserve, and in wartime they play a crucial role in dismantling the enemy from the inside. I know more than most about how important every individual who stands up for justice is, as my own country, Ukraine, has been at war for 4 years now, so every little action contributes to victory. Although I've never met or seen them, I know that there are numerous people out there who risk their lives for the greater good in more ways than one, and who deserve to have their stories told, which is why Noor Inayat Khan stood out to me.

Noor Inayat Khan, or codename Madeline, was a Muslim of Indian heritage who served as a British secret agent during World War II in the Special Operations Executive (SOE). On the night of June 16, 1943, she became the first female wireless operator to be dropped into the Nazi-occupied France, where she had previously lived, to help the French resistance and send messages back to Britain. She started working with the resistance network "Prosper," however within days of her deployment, all the high-ranking agents were captured by the Nazis, leaving Noor as the only operator in the field for the next 4 months. The Gestapo were aware of her operations and were desperate to catch her, however Noor managed to evade them all throughout the summer. On October 13, 1943, after being betrayed, she was captured by the Gestapo and in November she was sent to Pforzheim prison in Germany where she was kept in chains and in solitary confinement. Despite repeated torture, she refused to reveal any information. In September 1944, Noor was transferred to Dachau concentration camp where she was murdered with a single shot. Her last words were "liberté."

Despite many warnings and urges to return, she refused, determined to keep the final link between London and Paris. When captured, in the face of death, she stood tall and refused to break. Nothing obliged her to take her position in the war and sacrifice her life, neither her nationality, nor the ways of her family, however she chose to do it; she chose to fight because of her principles and sense of justice, and she did it with admirable and remarkable courage. Her whole life was filled with sacrifice, from the moment her father died and she had to look after her siblings and mother, to the

moment she lost her life for justice. Her final word, "liberté," and her refusal to talk under interrogation made her a martyr in the resistance against fascism. On January 16, 1946, France awarded her the Croix de Guerre, the highest civilian honor. Three years later in 1949, England awarded her the George Cross.

In my piece, I wanted to display the cat-and-mouse game that Noor had to survive each day. She is seen walking past two German officers who do not seem to pay any attention to her, but she is on her toes, eyeing them warily. I used pictures and descriptions of Noor in her disguise as Madeline to create her image. The seemingly simple suitcase in her hands, the one she took with her everywhere, is the most incriminating thing about her, as inside it contains a wireless set, the trademark tool of secret agents. Another thing that stands out is the photo gallery on the wall behind the figures. After a closer look, many of the photographs are of Noor herself, her family and her childhood, the others are of French resistance fighters. All of them encircle my hero's life and the lives of many others, many of which couldn't exist without Noor and her perseverance. I combined ink and watercolor in my piece, where only Noor is painted in color, since her legacy and the hope she has given live on forever.

The heroic actions of Noor Inayat Khan are still spoken about today, and through my art I wish to honor her further. I hope it will help people understand the struggles that she had to go through and the sacrifices she had to make for freedom. Her sense of justice and strong principles were what lead her to make the decisions that she did and leave such a huge impact, which teaches me to always follow my heart and stand on what I believe is right, unafraid of where it might lead me. ARTEFFECT gave me the opportunity to learn about a hero who isn't talked about enough, so I will continue the chain, and teach others about her deeds. I wish to share this piece on social media and in my community, along with her story, so that she lives on in our hearts forever. However not all heroes get the same amount of attention, so I will make it my purpose to spread word of all who risk their lives for freedom, because everyone deserves to have their story told.