



MEDAL OF HONOR:

Spc. 5 Dwight W. Birdwell



Biography



Hometown: Bell, Oklahoma

Unit: 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division

Military Occupation (MOS): Armored Crewman (11E)

Enlisted: May 1966

Deployments: Vietnam War (1967)



Dwight W. Birdwell was born in Amarillo, Texas, on Jan. 19, 1948. He grew up in the small, predominantly Cherokee Indian community of Bell in Adair County, Oklahoma. He attended Bell Grade School, and graduated from Stilwell High School in 1966. A citizen of the Cherokee Nation, he entered the Army on May 24, 1966, and earned two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star for meritorious service and two Purple Hearts.

Birdwell was assigned to Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division. He received the first Silver Star for heroism on Jan. 31, 1968, when his unit raced to defend Tan Son Nhut Air Base, which was under attack during the Tet Offensive. Cavalry Troop C was the first American ground unit from outside the airbase to respond to the attack. When Birdwell's tank commander was seriously wounded, Birdwell took command and placed intense fire on the enemy until his ammunition was expended. He then retrieved an M-60 machine gun and continued firing at the enemy until the weapon was damaged by enemy fire, which also wounded Birdwell. With disregard for his own safety, he ran through a hail of enemy fire to get more ammunition for his men from other damaged vehicles.

On the night of July 4, 1968, he again risked his life to rescue more Americans, some of them wounded, who were stranded in a battle zone in an enemy-occupied village. Seeing a damaged Army personnel carrier, he exposed himself to heavy enemy fire while loading all of the wounded and evacuating them to safety. He then went back into the village to rescue more Americans, for which he was awarded his second Silver Star for bravery.

Birdwell returned home in December 1968. He attended Northeastern State University, and then the University of Oklahoma School of Law, graduating in 1976. He and his wife of 53 years have two children and two grandchildren.

Birdwell was a member of the Judicial Appeals Tribunal (Supreme Court) of the Cherokee Nation from 1987 to 1999, serving as its chief justice from 1995 to 1996 and 1998 to 1999. He is now a practicing attorney in Oklahoma City. For a number of years he served on the Cherokee Nation Judicial Appeals Tribunal.





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Battle Narrative

Spc. 5 Dwight D. Birdwell distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division, in the Republic of Vietnam on Jan. 31, 1968.

On this date, a large enemy element initiated an assault on the Tan Son Nhut Airbase near Saigon. Birdwell's unit bore the brunt of the initial attack, which resulted in the disabling or destruction of many of the unit's vehicles and the incapacitation of his tank commander.

Birdwell, under heavy enemy small-arms fire, moved the tank commander to a place of safety and assumed control of the vehicle. Realizing his tank was the first line of defense for the troop, he used its cannon, machine gun and his rifle to place effective fire on the enemy force.

From the exposed position of the tank commander's hatch, Birdwell engaged the enemy with machine gun fire and provided situation reports to his squadron commander until the communications system became damaged due to enemy fire. After having expended all of his ammunition, Birdwell dismounted and maneuvered to his squadron commander's helicopter, which had been downed by enemy fire, and retrieved two machine guns and ammunition, with which he and a comrade suppressed the enemy.

When his machine gun was hit by enemy fire and exploded, resulting in wounds to his face and torso, Birdwell refused evacuation and moved amongst the disabled vehicles and defensive positions, collecting ammunition to distribute to the remaining defenders. While under harassing fire, Birdwell led a small group of defenders past the enemy force and personally engaged the enemy with hand grenades, which disrupted their assault until reinforcements arrived. Upon receiving reinforcement, Birdwell aided in evacuating the wounded until he was ordered to seek attention for his wounds.

Throughout the entire engagement, Birdwell repeatedly placed himself in extreme danger to protect his team and to defeat the enemy. His extraordinary heroism and selflessness beyond the call of duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.

