

Dwight W. Birdwell – 19 Jan 1948 - Present

Dwight W. Birdwell was born in Amarillo, Potter County, Texas to parents Thomas Ward and Lois Ava Smallwood. He grew up in the small town of Bell, Oklahoma, a mostly Native American community near the Arkansas border. He attended school in nearby Stillwell, Oklahoma. Birdwell, who is Cherokee, said he learned to fish and hunt from his father— skills that likely helped him survive in Vietnam.

Dwight graduated high school in 1966 and joined the Army shortly afterward. He received training at the Armored School in Fort Knox, Kentucky and was sent to Korea. After coming home on leave in September 1967, Birdwell was reassigned to the 2nd Battalion, 34th Armored Division, which was already in Vietnam. Birdwell was eventually reassigned to the 4th Cavalry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division.

The 20-year-old was near Saigon in South Vietnam when the Tet Offensive began in late January 1968. He was assigned to Troop C of the regiment's 3rd Squadron.

Dwight Birdwell returned to the United States in December 1968 and married his wife Virginia shortly afterward. They have two children, Stephanie and Edward. Dwight enrolled at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. He then continued his education at the University of Oklahoma, graduating with a law degree in 1976.

Birdwell was a member of the Judicial Appeals Tribunal (Supreme Court) of the Cherokee Nation from 1987 to 1999, serving as its chief justice twice. He still practices law in Oklahoma City with a focus on energy, natural resources and Native American law.

Army Gen. Glenn Otis, Birdwell's commander in Vietnam, worked for decades after the war to get Birdwell's Silver Star from the air base battle upgraded to the Medal of Honor. In a 2011 letter to an Oklahoma congressman, Otis asked for support for Birdwell's cause, saying

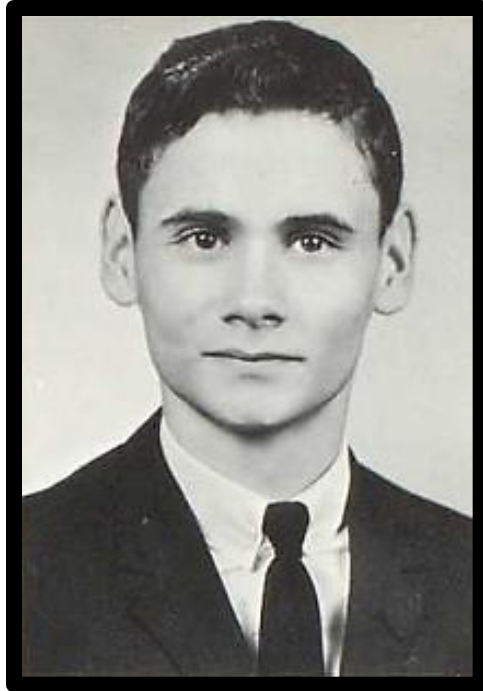
"bureaucratic missteps" were the reason for the initial oversight that he was hoping to correct. General Otis died in 2013, but others took over the effort, which eventually got the attention of the Pentagon.

Recently, that decades-long quest was realized. Dwight Birdwell, 74, received the Medal of Honor from President Joe Biden on July 5, 2022, during a White House ceremony. Dwight Birdwell is the first Native American to receive the Medal of Honor for service during the Vietnam War.

Dwight E. Birdwell's Medal of Honor Citation reads: "Specialist Five Dwight W. Birdwell distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with C Troop, 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division in the Republic of Vietnam on 31 January 1968. On this date, C Troop was ordered to move south to help repel an enemy attack on Tan Son Nhut Airbase. As the C Troop column of tanks and armored personnel carriers approached the west gate of Tan Son Nhut Airbase, it came under intense enemy fire from a building to its right. Unbeknown to C Troop, it had driven directly into an enemy force consisting of three battalions. The column tried to push through the initial attack but the lead tank, crippled by a rocket-propelled grenade explosion, was blocking the way forward. C Troop immediately came under heavy enemy fire from both sides of the road. Specialist Five Birdwell, upon seeing that his tank commander was wounded by enemy fire, immediately went to his aid. Under intense enemy fire, he lowered the injured tank commander to the ground, and moved him to safety. Specialist Five Birdwell then, with complete disregard for his own safety, mounted the tank and assumed the tank commander's position. Standing in the tank commander's hatch with the upper half of his body exposed to heavy enemy fire, Specialist Five Birdwell used the tank's .50 caliber machine gun and 90mm main gun to suppress the enemy attack. With the ammunition for the 90mm main gun exhausted, he continued to fire the .50 caliber machine gun until it overheated. At this point, Specialist Five Birdwell, rather than abandoning his position, continued to engage the enemy with his M-16 rifle, sometimes exposing his entire body to enemy fire in order to

engage the enemy from a better vantage point. When a U.S. helicopter crashed nearby, Specialist Five Birdwell, under withering enemy fire, dismounted and moved to the helicopter where he retrieved two M-60 machine guns and ammunition. After giving one M-60 and ammunition to a fellow soldier, he remounted his tank and used the other M-60 to again engage the enemy. Specialist Five Birdwell continued to engage the enemy with complete disregard for his own safety until the M-60 he was firing was hit by enemy fire. Specialist Five Birdwell, now wounded in the face, neck, chest, and arms, dismounted the tank but refused to be medically evacuated. Instead, Specialist Five Birdwell, under enemy fire, rallied fellow soldiers to advance toward the front of the armored column where they set up a defensive position by a large tree. From this position, he and the other soldiers engaged the enemy with M-16 fire and grenades. As the enemy fire lessened, Specialist Five Birdwell gathered ammunition from disabled vehicles and helped wounded soldiers move to safer positions. His leadership and tenacity under fire inspired the other C Troop soldiers to continue fighting against the superior enemy force, and directly contributed to the enemy's ultimate defeat. Specialist Five Birdwell's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and 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.”

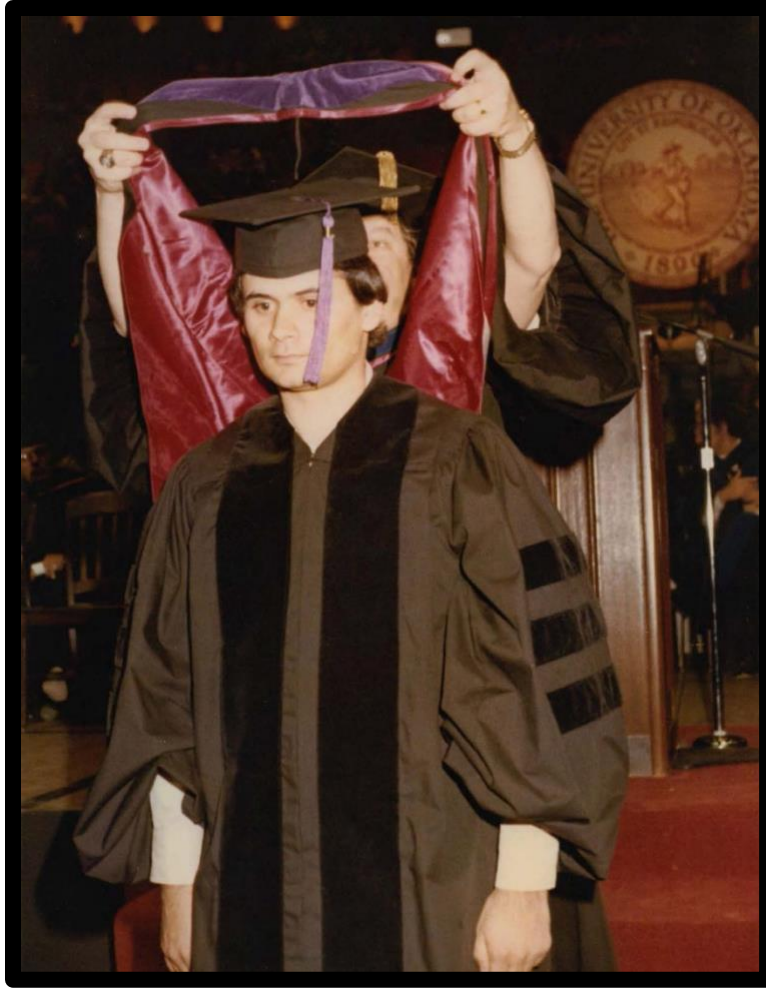
Following the remarks by President Joe Biden, Dwight Birdwell said the following: “I’m overwhelmed. Receiving the Medal of Honor is a validation of a long-standing tradition of Cherokee people -- men and women -- serving not only to protect and defend the United States, but the Cherokee people as well,” Birdwell said. “It gives validation to that tradition. It’s not about me; it also brings honor to those I served with who died in battle. It’s as much for them as it is for me. The big thing is that I’m so proud of being a Cherokee citizen and bringing honor to the Cherokee Nation and the Cherokee people.”



Stillwell High School – 1966



Specialist Five Birdwell

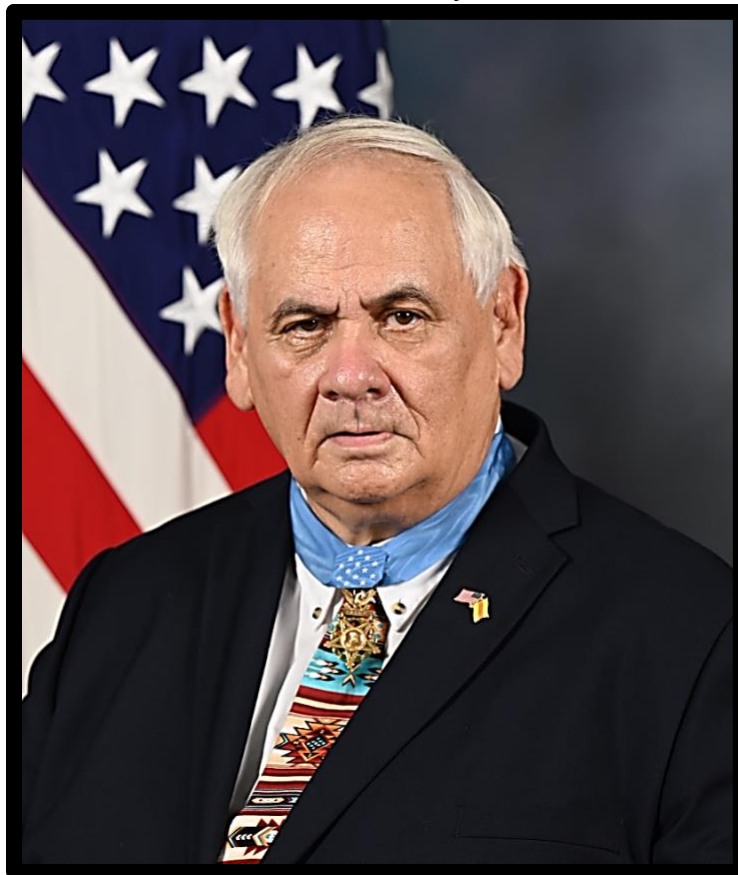


University of Oklahoma – JD Degree 1979



White House – July 5, 2022

White House – July 5, 2022



Dwight W. Birdwell – Medal of Honor Recipient