

## **DWIGHT WAYNE BIRDWELL'S BIOGRAPHY**

**Background:** Dwight Wayne Birdwell was born on January 19, 1948, in Amarillo, Texas, and is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation. He grew up in the small, predominantly Cherokee Indian community of Bell, Oklahoma, attended Bell Grade School, and graduated from Stilwell High School in 1966. A school counselor advised Mr. Birdwell that he should accept his station in life as a Native American and not try to attend college but stay in his community.

**Education and Professional Career:** After Spec. 5 Birdwell was discharged from the Army in 1968 and returned home in December 1968. He later authored the book 100 Miles of Bad Road: An Armored Cavalry Man in VN 1967 to 1968 to record his combat experiences.

Mr. Birdwell entered and graduated from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah in 1972. He graduated with academic distinction and then graduated from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1976 also with academic distinction.

He served as 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 has been a practicing attorney in Oklahoma City for over 45 years and has been given the highest legal peer-review ratings.

Mr. Birdwell was inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame in 2017. He was awarded the Oklahoma Bar Association Medal of Valor in November, 2022, the University of Oklahoma College of Law's "Order of the Owl" award, the College of Law's highest honor, in February, 2023, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Oklahoma Chapter of American Board of Trial Advocates in

April of 2023 and the Northeastern State University President's Award in September 2022.

**Personal life:** Mr. Birdwell has been married to Virginia Birdwell for 55 years, and they have two children and two grandchildren.

**Military career:** After high school, Mr. Birdwell entered the United States Army on May 24th, 1966, and was later assigned to Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division. He achieved the rank of Specialist 5. He also served in Korea and then volunteered for Vietnam where Spec.5 Birdwell received two Purple Hearts for combat injuries; two Silver Stars, the third highest military decoration; and one Bronze Star for meritorious service. He received his first Silver Star for combat heroism on January 31, 1968, when his unit raced to defend Tan Son Nhut Air Base, which was under attack during the Tet Offensive. Troop C was the first American ground unit from outside the airbase to respond to the attack. *Refer to his acts of bravery and combat heroism in the text of his Medal of Honor citation below.*

**Medal of Honor:** Mr. Birdwell the only Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma citizen from the Vietnam War to receive the Medal of Honor. President Biden honored Mr. Birdwell with the Medal of Honor for his actions at the White House on July 5th, 2022. His actions of bravery were during the Tet Offensive attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base on January 31, 1968.

The text of Mr. Birdwell's Medal of Honor citation reads: Spec. 5 Dwight W. 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.

**Summary:** Dwight Birdwell exemplifies the highest qualities of patriotism, leadership, trustworthiness, and service to others, not just as a Vietnam combat veteran, but he has continued to demonstrate these values throughout all spheres of his life as a citizen of the United States, the State of Oklahoma, and the Cherokee Nation. His leadership, patriotism, and service to others

saved the lives of many combat soldiers, impacted the Cherokee Nation's justice system and the quality of lives for those he served.