Birdwell awarded Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor is an upgrade from the Silver Star that Birdwell received for his actions in saving his fellow soldiers on Jan. 31, 1968.

BY WILL CHAVEZ
Assistant Editor

WASHINGTON D.C. – In a White House ceremony on July 5, Cherokee Nation citizen Dwight Birdwell was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Joe Biden with family and friends in attendance.

The medal is awarded to members of the armed forces who distinguish themselves "conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their own lives above and beyond the call of duty" and is the highest military award a serviceperson can receive.

The other U.S. Army veterans honored for their heroic actions during the Vietnam War are retired Maj. John Duffy, Staff Sgt. Edward Kavezko and former Spc. 5 Dennis E. Kanshoi who received the award posthumously.

It’s been a long journey to this day for these heroes and their families. More than 50 years have passed since, as young men, these soldiers first proved their mettle. But time has not diminished their astonishing bravery, their selflessness in putting the lives of others ahead of their own, and the gratitude we as a nation owe them,” President Biden said during the ceremony.

Birdwell, now 74, earned the MOH while serving with Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division, in the Republic of Vietnam in 1968. Birdwell and his unit were "very flankered" in Gen. Otis, his former commander in Vietnam, and all of the personnel who made it possible for the Silver Star he received to be upgraded to the MOH.

During the July 5 ceremony, Biden read Birdwell’s citation and about the battle that took place at the Tan Son Nhut Airbase near Saigon on Jan. 31, 1968.

"Unknown to the approximately 100 men of C Troop, they were moving to be taking on a full regiment of Viet Cong likely to be 1,000 strong. They arrived, the troop engaged the Viet Cong forces, and Specialist Birdwell’s unit took the main brunt of the attack with many tanks and vehicles disabled. When his tank commander was hit and gravely wounded, Specialist Birdwell got him to a place of safety and send shrapnel into the enemy. A machine gun he used to fire was eventually hit by enemy fire, which caused it to explode and send shrapnel into Birdwell’s face, hands and arms, but he remained on the battlefield.

"When he was ordered to load onto a medivac helicopter, he compliied, and this I find amazing, only to crawl right back off the other side and keep on fighting. That’s what you call taking orders and then causing trouble. God love you," Biden said. "Only after reinforcements arrived and only after he helped treat the evacuees and his fellow wounded did Specialist Birdwell agree to evacuate himself. At the time Birdwell received the Silver Star for outstanding heroism on the battlefield, it took decades for his commanding officer, Gen. Glenn Otis, to realize Birdwell had not received the full honor he had earned. In retirement, Gen. Otis made sure to correct the record and fully document Birdwell’s actions to make this day possible."

The president mentioned Birdwell is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and shared Birdwell’s statement that he was encouraged to serve his country by Cherokee veterans he knew in Adair County.

"I’m grateful for all you have given our country and that at long last your story is being honored as it should have been always,” President Joe Biden to Medal of Honor recipient Dwight Birdwell.

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"I’m grateful for all you have given our country and that at long last your story is being honored as it should have been always," Biden said to Birdwell. Birdwell was honorably discharged from the