

# Medal of Honor

## Spc. 5 Dwight W. Birdwell, U.S. Army

President Joseph Biden awarded the Medal of Honor to Spc. 5 Dwight W. Birdwell at a White House ceremony 4 July 2022 for his actions at Tan Son Nhut Airbase near Saigon, Republic of Vietnam, during a massive North Vietnamese attack known as the Tet Offensive. Birdwell was then a tank crewman assigned to Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division.

As part of the countrywide offensive, over a thousand North Vietnamese soldiers attacked the airbase on 31 January 1968, Vietnam's lunar New Year (Tet). About one hundred soldiers from Birdwell's unit responded to the attack in an armored column of tanks and cavalry assault vehicles, driving directly into three enemy battalions. The fierce North Vietnamese attack disabled or destroyed many of the armored vehicles and seriously injured Birdwell's tank commander. Birdwell took action, ignoring heavy small-arms fire to move the commander to safety and take control of the tank.

Although exposed to enemy fire, Birdwell provided situation reports to his squadron commander and fired at the enemy with the tank's main gun and machine gun until both became inoperable and his communications equipment was destroyed. He then continued to fight at the tank with his M-16 rifle.

When the commander's helicopter was shot down, Birdwell moved to the aircraft under fire, retrieved two M-60 machine guns with ammunition, and returned to the tank, where he and a fellow soldier continued to engage the enemy fighters.

Birdwell's machine gun was hit by enemy fire and exploded, injuring him on his face and upper body, but he refused evacuation and continued to fight. Taking charge, he consolidated the remaining soldiers, redistributed ammunition, and moved the wounded to a safer location. He then organized a small counterattack force, which disrupted the enemy attack with small-arms fire



During a ceremony in the East Room of the White House on 4 July 2022, President Joe Biden awards the Medal of Honor to Dwight Birdwell for his actions on 31 January 1968 during the Vietnam War. (Photo by Sgt. Henry Villarama, U.S. Army)

and hand grenades until friendly reinforcements arrived. With the airbase secured, Birdwell ignored his own wounds to assist with medical evacuations.

In his remarks at the award ceremony, Biden expressed awe for Birdwell's exploits. The president commented, "He used the tank's cannon. He used the tank's machine gun. He used his personal rifle. He sustained fire, drove back the attackers, and created a place of relative safety for injured men behind the tank to take cover. He provided battlefield updates to his commanders until the enemy shot the communication system right off of his helmet."

Biden continued, "When he was ordered to load onto the medevac helicopter, he complied—this I find amazing—only to crawl right back off the other side and to keep on fighting. That's what you call 'taking orders and causing trouble.' God love you."

Birdwell originally was awarded two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star for meritorious service, and two Silver Stars for his actions in Vietnam. However, his first Silver Star, for his actions at the airbase, was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in part due to decades-long efforts by Gen. Glenn Otis, Birdwell's commander in Vietnam. Birdwell is the thirty-third Native American to receive the Medal of Honor.

For more on Birdwell's Vietnam experiences, read his autobiography *A Hundred Miles of Bad Road: An Armored Cavalryman in Vietnam, 1967–68*. ■