

Teacher Inquiry Kit: 6-12

Dwight Birdwell

Title	Specialist Five Dwight W. Birdwell: Medal of Honor Recipient and Former Chief Justice of the Tribunal of the Cherokee Nation
Author(s)	Laura Douglas
Grade Level	6-12
Soldier	Dwight Birdwell
Tribal Affiliation	Cherokee
Branch of Service	Army
Dates of Service	Enlisted May 1966, Deployed Vietnam War 1967-1968
Essential Question	Why did Dwight Birdwell receive the Medal of Honor and why is this significant? How did Dwight Birdwell military service impact his career?
Contextual Paragraph	<p>Dwight W. Birdwell was born in Amarillo Texas on January 19, 1948. He was a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and grew up in the predominantly Cherokee Indian community of Bell, Oklahoma. He attended Bell Grade School and graduated from Stilwell High School in 1966 before entering the Army on May 24, 1966.</p> <p>Birdwell was assigned to Troop C, the first American ground unit to respond to the attack on the Tan Son Nhut Air Base which was under attack during the Tet Offensive on January 31, 1967. Birdwell's</p>


tank commander was seriously wounded so Birdwell took command and continued firing on the attacking People's Army of Vietnam until he used all his ammunition. He retrieved two machine guns from a crashed helicopter and continued firing until his weapon was damaged and he was injured. Birdwell ran through enemy fire to retrieve more ammunition for his troops from other damaged vehicles. Birdwell received his first Silver Star for his heroism in battle on January 31, 1968.


Birdwell risked his life again on July 4, 1968 to rescue more American troops, some of them wounded, who were stranded in a battle zone in an enemy-occupied village. He exposed himself to heavy enemy fire while loading all 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 to the United States in December 1968, attended Northeastern State University and then the University of Oklahoma School of Law. He graduated in 1976 and began his law practice. He opened his own firm and concentrated on Energy, Natural Resources and Indian Law.

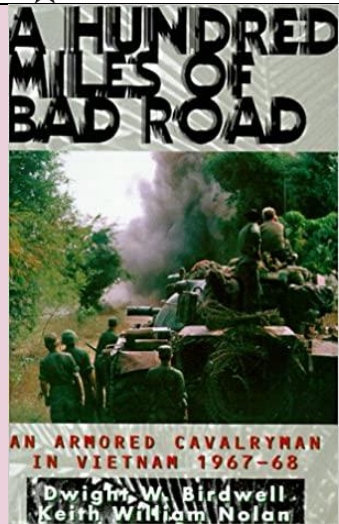
He was a member of the Judicial Appeals Tribunal (Supreme Court) of the Cherokee Nation from 1987 to 1999, serving as its chief justice from 1995 to 1996 and 1998 to 1999. The Tribunal is responsible for resolving all disputes arising within the Cherokee Nation. He helped lay the foundation of the Cherokee tribe's modern court system. In 1997, Birdwell co-authored *A Hundred Miles of Bad Road*, an autobiographical Vietnam war story written by a "tanker" about his tour of duty before and after the Tet Offensive.

As of 2022, he is still a practicing attorney in Oklahoma City. He and his wife have been married for 53 years and have two children and two grandchildren.


C3 Standards	<p>C3 Standards: https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts. (D2.His.1.6-8) Analyze how people’s perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created. (D2.His.6.6-8) Describe the roles of political, civil, and economic organizations in shaping people’s lives. (D2.Civ.6.6-8)
Primary Source 1: 	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQl0wCZph-8
Title of Primary Source	Spc. 5 Dwight W. Birdwell Receives Medal of Honor from President Joe Biden on July 5, 2022
Suggested questions for the source	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe what you see in the video of President Biden and Mr. Birdwell? What was Mr. Birdwell wearing when he received the Medal of Honor that might indicate his tribal affiliation? How did Birdwell continue to build a community of service after he leaves the military? How does Birdwell feel about receiving the Medal of Honor and his time in the military? Describe 3 incidents that Birdwell experienced that caused him to receive the Medal of Honor?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What values do you think Birdwell holds dear? Give evidence of these. How are these similar or different from the values portrayed on the Medal of Honor?
Primary Source 2:	https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/birdwell/


	
Title of Primary Source	Medal of Honor: Specialist Five Dwight W. Birdwell
Suggested questions for the source	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Closely examine the photos on this website. Describe three of the photos that you see from different times in Birdwell's life. What is happening in each of these photos? Click on the images to read more about each. 2. Examine the photos from the ceremony in which Birdwell was inducted into the Pentagon Hall of Heroes. Can you name the different flags in the background? Identify 3 symbols that you see in each flag. Explain what each symbol and color represent. 3. Read the text of Birdwell's Medal of Honor citation. Describe three incidents from January 31, 1968, where Birdwell acted heroically. What do you think would have happened to Birdwell's Troop C if he had not been there?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<p>"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." President Joseph Biden Jr., White House Ceremony, July 5, 2022.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why do you think it's important to list all of the different weapons and the different tasks that Birdwell performed on the day that he earned his Medal of Honor? 2. How do you think Birdwell felt as President Biden said these words? Why do you think this?
Primary Source 3	<p>https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/tet-offensive</p> <p>https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tan_Son_Nhut_Air_Base_during_the_Tet_Offensive.jpg – image</p>

	
Title of Primary Source	Soldiers during the Tet Offensive, Vietnam War 1968, The History Channel
Suggested questions for the source (3-5)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the Tet Offensive and how did it impact the Vietnam War? Describe how it impacted the United States? Describe how it impacted the North Vietnamese people? Describe how it impacted the South Vietnamese people? 2. What military base was nearly taken during the Tet Offensive? 3. Name three cities that were attacked in the Tet Offensive? What was the most significant city attacked and what important buildings were overrun? 4. Describe Dwight Birdwell's role in the Tet Offensive. How does he feel about his role in this Offensive? How do you know this? 5. Look at a map of Vietnam. Find the locations and cities involved in the Tet Offensive. What do you notice about the geographic area?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On what date did the Tet Offensive begin? What was the importance of this date? Research other battles and wars that began on significant dates. Why do you think military strategists begin battles on holidays and celebrations? 2. The Tet Offensive is often referred to as a major turning point in the Vietnam War. Do you think this was an important turning point in the Vietnam War? Why or why not? Cite three reasons you think this.
Primary Source 4	https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0891416285/ref=x_gr_w_bb_sout?ie=UTF8&tag=x_gr_w_bb_sout-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0891416285&SubscriptionId=1MGPYB6YW3HWK55XCGG2




<p>Title of Primary Source</p>	<p>A Hundred Miles of Bad Roads</p>
<p>Suggested questions for the source (3-5)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The title of Mr. Birdwell's book is A Hundred Miles of Bad Roads: An Armored Cavalryman in Vietnam 1967-68. Why do you think they chose this title? What is a cavalryman? 2. Describe the photo on the cover of the book? Why do you think this image was selected? From the resources you have explored, find three other photos that could have also worked for the cover? Why did you choose them? 3. Dwight Birdwell collaborated with renowned Vietnam War historian Keith William Nolan. Who do you think proposed the idea of this book and why could it be a good partnership?
<p>Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reviews of A Hundred Miles of Bad Roads include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...it will be looked back on a hundred years from now as defining what that war was like." -- The Thornton Literary Agency, LLC, October 1997 • "...the book should be read by every American seeking insight on the 'lessons of Vietnam.'" -- The Daily Oklahoman, June 1, 1998 • The collaboration of a good soldier and a good writer produces a Vietnam memory that is better than good. -- American Library Association, September 1997

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Do these reviews make you want to read the book? Why or why not? 1. Have you read any books lately that you would use these reviews to describe? 2. One review of this book stated, "Dwight Birdwell's coming of age took place, as it did for many young men of the sixties, in Vietnam. There he fought the war from the command cupola of an M48 Patton tank, an experience far removed from the stereotypical grunt in the rice paddies." 3. What does the phrase "coming of age" mean and why do you think this was used to describe the book?
<p>Primary Source 5</p> 	<p>https://www.loc.gov/item/2017878945/</p>
<p>Title of Primary Source</p>	<p>US Army Medal of Honor</p>
<p>Suggested questions for the source (3-5)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read more about the Medal of Honor here. Examine the images of the Medal of Honor. Describe the colors and symbols of the medal and explain why you think each was chosen. 2. How many Medals of Honor recipients have there been? 3. Discuss the history of the Medal of Honor. What do you think is the most interesting fact about it? 4. Who was the first person to receive the Medal of Honor? Why did they receive the medal?

<p>Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Medal of Honor is awarded to members of the armed forces who distinguish themselves conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of their own lives, clearly distinguishing the recipients above his or her comrades. Do you think Mr. Birdwell meets these criteria? Explain. 2. According to this website, by Federal Statute, recommendations for the Medal must be submitted within 3 years of the valorous act and the Medal must be presented within 5 years. Any submissions outside of this timeline require an Act of Congress to waive the time limits. Why do you think these limits are in place? Do you think this should be changed. Why or why not?
<p>Primary Source 6:</p> 	<p>https://indiancountrytoday.com/the-press-pool/chokeke-nation-citizen-dwight-birdwell-receives-medal-of-honor-from-president-biden</p>
<p>Title of Primary Source</p>	<p>Cherokee Nation citizen Dwight Birdwell receives Medal of Honor with Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr.</p>
<p>Suggested questions for the source</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Not every service member has received the full recognition they deserve,” President Biden said during the Medal of Honor ceremony. “Today, we are setting the record straight.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What did he mean by this? What evidence do we have that “we are setting the record straight?”

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. “Mr. Birdwell is a decorated Vietnam veteran who served in the U.S. Army and was later awarded for his extraordinary heroism in multiple battles in 1968,” said Cherokee Nation Secretary of Veteran Affairs S. Joe Crittenden. “He is a longtime servant to the Cherokee people and a highly respected citizen of the Cherokee Nation, and I am proud to say on a personal level that Dwight is a dear friend. He is deserving of this award and is a true Cherokee Warrior.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What do you think Mr. Crittenden means by “true Cherokee Warrior”? Describe three incidents where Mr. Birdwell demonstrated this. 3. According to this article, how many people were involved in advocating for Mr. Birdwell to receive the Medal of Honor? Does this seem like a long or short process?
Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Birdwell, at age 74, is the first Native American to receive the Medal of Honor for his heroic service in 1968 during the Vietnam War. Why do you think it took so long for a Native American Vietnam veteran to receive the Medal of Honor? Research other Medal of Honor recipients. How long did it take other groups of people (women, African American, etc.) to receive their first Medal of Honor? Do you think this is changing today? What evidence do you have for thinking this?

<p>Primary Source 7:</p> 	<p>https://www.cherokeecourts.org/History/Biographies-of-Judicial-Officials/Justice-Dwight-W-Birdwell</p>
<p>Title of Primary Source</p>	<p>Judicial Biography of Justice Dwight W Birdwell</p>
<p>Suggested questions for the source</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where did Birdwell go to law school? How long after his service in Vietnam did, he go to law school? 2. How has Mr. Birdwell's military experience carried over to his community service and career? How does this impact the type of law that he practices? 3. Why do you think Birdwell chose this photo for his Judicial Biography? Examine other photos of Birdwell. Would you have selected a different photo? Why or why not? 4. What was Birdwell's role on the Cherokee Tribunal? What did he do in this role?
<p>Possible discussion prompts beyond the questions. (2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which military medals were awarded to Birdwell and on what dates? What are the requirements associated with earning each of these medals? What does he think of them? 2. Research the Cherokee Tribunal. How is it similar and different from the US Supreme Court?
<p>Works Cited</p>	<p>Birdwell, D. W., & Nolan, K. W. (1997). <i>A Hundred Miles of Bad Road: An Armored Cavalryman in Vietnam, 1967-68</i>. Presidio.</p>

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