

To Whom it May Concern:
Regarding the actions of Dwight Birdwell
3rd Platoon, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry

Written by Oliver Jones, US56956772
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I was Medical Specialist Oliver Jones and at the time, I was attached to Charlie Troop, Second Platoon, Third Squadron, Fourth Cavalry, Twenty-fifth Infantry Division. I was assigned to Headquarter Troop, Third Squadron, Fourth Cavalry, Twenty-fifth Infantry.

I arrived in Vietnam on 14 December 1967. My medical training was done at General Leonard Wood Army Hospital in Missouri. I am Port Gamble S'Klallam Indian from the state of Washington. My friends either called me "Doc" or "Chief." I was and still am proud and honored to have served my country with my military service. I took many enemy soldiers' lives but I also saved many lives with my medical training and the duty required to accomplish what was required of me to render first aid to our

wounded.

31 January 1968

About 4:00 a.m. the red alert sirens at Cu Chi started and we were receiving a lot of incoming mortars and rockets. We were ordered to grab our gear, mount up and then told we were going to Tan Son Nuht Air Force Base because they were getting hit pretty hard by enemy troops. We went cross country and came out on Route One east of Cu Chi. If Captain Varrant hadn't made that decision we may have been ambushed at the rubber trees outside the main gate before the town of Cu Chi or ambushed in the town of Cu Chi. On the way to Tan Son Nuht we were given artificial lights by flares from a chopper.

Our first platoon was guarding Hoc Mon Bridge that night the attack started. Just before we got to the air force base, Captain Varrant was in his track right behind our second platoon command track which I was on with platoon leader Lt. Jim Pinto, driver Frank Cuff, and track commander, St. Augustine. Capt. Varrant asked Pinto to pull over so he could be closer to the front of the column. Platoon Sgt. Patrick Strayer was leading the way followed by our scout track, then our infantry track and then our track 20.

He proceeded to pass us and ended up right behind our lead tank. If Capt. Varrant hadn't done that, everyone on our track may have been killed that day.

We, our second platoon, drove right between 121 North Vietnamese Army soldiers that were already inside the air force base and approximately *2000-2500 NVA troops outside the gate. After we passed the factory that was near the south end of the air force runway we started receiving heavy fire from the right side of the road. There were some hootches and several trees and brush to our right, offering cover and concealment for the NVA. When we did our steer right, we did so right by a billboard which obstructed the enemy from getting a clear shot at us with rocket-propelled grenades. They hit all of the vehicles in front of us and the ones behind us with RPGs. They overran the first two vehicles and shot everyone, lead tank 25 and track 06 (Capt. Varrant). We were all returning fire off to our right with our 50 caliber and M-60 machine guns. Sgt. Strayer managed to get off his tank and ran back to our track as ours was the only one not hit and was telling us to fire towards the front because all of them were being overrun and everyone was being killed. Right when he was telling us that, he was wounded and fell off the side of our rig. I grabbed both of my aid bags and

jumped off our rig to help him. I was next to him checking his wounds when three NVA soldiers came up on the road and began firing AK 47s at us. I dropped to cover Sgt. Strayer, but even so, he was hit again and died from being hit three different times. Sanchez, who was later killed, and Randazzo came up behind us and eliminated the three NVA threat.

That was the beginning of a very long day during which time I went to all of our vehicles and checked vitals on everyone and tended to and moved our many wounded to the ditch on the north side of the road between the road and the wire on the south end of the base. During the day-long battle many of our weapons were rendered inoperable because of the number of rounds that were shot through them, overheating the chambers, warping them, and melting the barrels of our 60s and 50s. We also ran out of ammo.

A lot of things happened that day, but I just want to hit on the things that were done by Dwight Birdwell, Captain Leo Varrant, and Col. Glenn Otis. Otis flew over several times giving us air cover from his chopper. He landed at least twice to evacuate our most seriously wounded and to deliver ammo.

On one occasion Birdwell got the 60s off his chopper and used one of them from the top of tank 35 to keep the enemy at bay so they wouldn't come across the road and kill the rest of us because we were out of ammo and working weapons. I don't know how Birdwell ended up on 35 tank, but he was the tank commander of the platoon sgt.'s tank. Because of the many rounds he fired that day from the tank's main gun, it's probably the main reason we, as the second platoon weren't overrun and wiped out that first day of the TET Offensive. Like I stated earlier, most of our rigs were hit and most of my friends were either killed or wounded in action. Because of our lack of personnel and weapons we started moving our wounded and the ones that were still able to fight towards a point near the tank Birdwell was firing from so we could defend a smaller area with our remaining people. I'm not sure if Birdwell fired most of his rounds from his main gun and I don't know if he ran out of 50 ammo or he just burned it up, but he was on the ground running from rig to rig looking for good working weapons and ammo. Finding none, when Otis' chopper landed, he grabbed the two 60s off his chopper and started returning fire again. He started returning fire from the top of tank 35. From his vantage point he had a clear vision of possible targets and he took advantage of

the situation. Of all the automatic weapon fire we received, it is an amazing miracle that Birdwell wasn't killed or wounded more seriously, an M60 machine gun was shot from his hands hitting him numerous times with shrapnel. After refusing dust off and with no thought for his own safety, he continued fully exposing himself to heavy and continuous enemy fire from the top of tank 35, throughout the day of the battle at Tan Son Nuht Air Force Base.

Recently I started corresponding with Dwight Birdwell via telephone and later via mail. I told him that I hadn't received my Combat Medic Badge or any of the commendations and citations I was put in for. Frank Cuff, Russell Boehme and several survivors from our unit are helping me with that. He then told me he was put in for the Medal of Honor but was down-graded to a silver star and that Lt. Col. Otis received the Distinguished Service Cross which was good. But they both went above and beyond the call of duty which allowed us to be successful that first day of the TET Offensive of 1968. If it wasn't for their courage and leadership, history would have been a lot different and all of our names would be on the wall in Washington, D.C. The Vietnam Memorial. If any one of these men, Captain Varrant, Dwight Birdwell, or Colonel Otis hadn't performed these

critical actions under fire, we would have lost the battle at Tan Son Nuht Air Force Base.

I hope you take this correspondence into consideration to reevaluate the Medal of Honor for Dwight Birdwell.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Oliver R. Jones".

Oliver R. Jones

*I didn't know there were that many enemy soldiers there until I was at the $\frac{3}{4}$ Cavalry Reunion in Chattanooga, Tennessee. A young brigadier general read the after action report about the battle telling us of the number of NVA, also saying it was the biggest battle in $\frac{3}{4}$ Cavalry history. He also said if we hadn't stopped them from taking the air force base, we would have lost the air force base, Saigon, and the southern part of South Vietnam.