

“Point Man in Vietnam”

John Shoemaker

In war, the infantry is the tip of the spear. In combat, when a platoon or a company of soldiers march towards the enemy, someone has to be “first” in line. That someone is the “Point Man” who is the literal point of the spear. It is considered the very worst position as the most dangerous.



William “Billy” Kraft was the Point Man for Charlie Company in the Second Battalion, 39th Infantry, 9th Division. Đồng Tâm Base Camp was established on the northern bank of the Mekong River about five miles west of Mỹ Tho upon General William Westmoreland's decision to gain full control over the upper Mekong Delta region. Westmoreland personally took part in site selection and chose the name Đồng Tâm meaning "united hearts and minds" or "singleness of mind, in thoughts, and actions" in Vietnamese.

Billy was in Vietnam from May of 1967 to May 1968, including some tough battles and the Tet Offensive. He operated out of the Đồng Tâm Base Camp. Paradoxically, even though he was trained to support the Mortar squad, he ended up as an infantryman doing the job everyone wanted to avoid. He would be the first to run into the enemy and alert the platoon and/or company.

His “Charlie” Company was working in the Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam which included lots of jungle and rice paddies. Sleeping and marching through water for months, Billy got malaria. He was in the hospital for a month at the sprawling base at Black Horse base camp. Soon after returning to his platoon, he was hacking his way through thick jungle with his machete when he tripped a wire that ignited a Chicom grenade. Billy and two others were wounded and medivac'd out to the hospital at Long Bin and then Cam Ranh Bay where he stayed another month. He still has metal shrapnel in his arm from the booby trap.

He was then assigned to support a large mortar known as an M2 4.2-inch mortar. At least during this time, he did not have to walk point in enemy territory.



During the interview, Billy sat back and shared that every so often he can remember the unique smell of the Delta Region of Vietnam and it stops him, as well as the sound of that other icon of the war – the Huey helicopter.

Upon returning to the U.S. at Fort Hood, TX, Billy worked for the City of New York's Sanitation Dept as a Supervisor in the South Bronx. When he married Louise DeCandido, they moved to Yonkers. Still not done with the military, he joined the Army National Guard and served 7 years before joining the Navy Seabees for 6 more years, and then, incredibly, he joined the Air Force in the Air National Guard for New York for another 5 years and earned a retirement from the military.

Today, Billy enjoys life in Highland Beach since 2003 at the Seagate Condominiums. His wife, Louise was a stock trader and passed in 2009. He has a daughter, Candice and two sons – one a retired detective/sergeant, Michael, and the other a firefighter, Vincent, both in New York City.



Billy mentioned that Delray is close to nice restaurants, especially at the Delray Sands in town. It certainly is a long way from eating C-Rations in the jungles and not showering for weeks or months. He also feels that the VA has treated him very well over the years.

As is typical of war veterans, they have a special appreciation for all that Highland Beach offers.