

30 May 2007

To: Glen Nicholls
From: SFC (Ret.) Tarlon Mobley

Ref: 5 May 68

Thank you very much for the e-mails and your interest in my eye-witness account of the events of 5 May 1968.

First of all, it was an honor to meet and talk with Ed Fischer and the other members of the 1/50th who visited our store. It has been a long time since I've met and talked with a Vietnam Vet who was in the same AO at the same time that I was; not to mention even witnessing the same battle.

Let me begin by apologizing if I am overly "wordy" in my account of what I remember about the battle. I want to be as accurate as my memory will allow so there won't be any confusion about what I'm trying to relate.

I am employed at Commando Military Supply in Columbus Ga. Part of my job description is "Hospitality and Greeter." When I met Ed and his friends, noting that they wore T-shirts with the 1/50th Crest emblem, I was elated because I haven't met a former member since I left Vietnam in 1969. I am the one who initiated the conversation about the battle, and here, I want to make it clear that my account was not solicited by Ed or his friends. I mention this fact because as I began to relate what I remember to them, I began to notice a rather strange look upon their faces. At that moment, I didn't know whether I had offended them or what. Then, Ed grabbed me by the arm and expressed a confirmation of what I had said to some facts that he knew about the battle.

I swear, to the best of my recollection, here is what I remember. I am recalling this event from the perspective of a PFC:

I was assigned to Lima Platoon (1st Plt.) C. Company 3/503 Abn. Inf., 173rd Abn. Bde. (Sep.) from 4 April '68 til 5 April '69. On the day of the battle, my company had been conducting platoon-size recon operations along the ridges, hilltops, and valleys (Central Highlands) within our Area of Operations. We were advised of, and had visual contact with a "sister element" (1/50th) also operating alongside our units.

From the vantage-point of our company assembly area, we could actually see (far down in the valley) several APC's of the Mech. Unit. As I remember the events, my company had received orders to clear a hilltop LZ for an immediate extraction to another location to provide covering fire and act as a blocking force for B. Co., 3/503rd. It was while we were waiting to be extracted that the element of the 1/50th came under attack from a sizeable enemy force.

There was a brief period of confusion on our part as to who exactly was under attack due partly because, as I remember it, our OP's were withdrawing to a closer position due to the extraction and, it was not clear whether or not they were the ones under attack. Then we could hear the unmistakable sound of .50 cal. being fired. Our attention was drawn to the valley floor where the 1/50th was positioned.

Never will I forget what I saw and felt. As we watched, we could see the miniature figures of enemy soldiers running toward the APC's (the ones that we could see), and tossing what we knew to be satchel charges. From my point of view, I couldn't see any tanks because of the vegetation. I could see the top of one APC and its exhaust smoke just inside the tree line. The one APC that could be seen clearly was position just outside of the tree line, I believe, so as to cover both up and down a small stream.

This APC was the most exposed vehicle and came under intense small-arms fire. We watched with dismay as we saw a figure run up along side of this vehicle and fling what appeared to be a satchel charge under the left-rear of the vehicle. While this was happening, the driver was trying to maneuver the APC into a turn but appeared to be hindered by something.

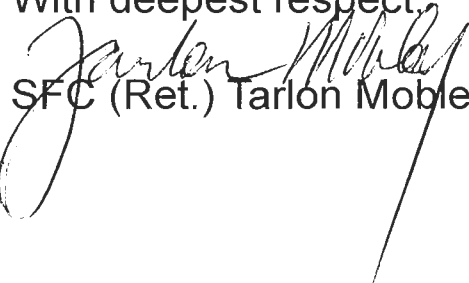
It's turret was not turning to engage the enemy with machinegun fire, nor could I see any signs of firing from the vehicle. At this point, the left side of the APC was facing toward us. I estimate the distance from our location to the battle site to be approximately 1000 to 1500 meters. I estimate the time of day to be around 1030 to 1130 hour. It could have been later, but I don't remember it being earlier.

The thing that is the most clear in my memory is our feeling of helplessness and profound anger at not being able to go and help our brothers. I remember shaking with anger and wiping tears from my eyes. Others were screaming with rage, and some had to be physically restrained from charging down the hillside. As I remember it, the choppers were already enroute for our extraction, and we were ordered to hold our position. We knew that other units were nearby but I don't recall any units arriving to assist them. At some point, I couldn't bear to watch anymore. I know that I was in shock. I can't remember how much time passed between watching that APC go up, and being extracted.

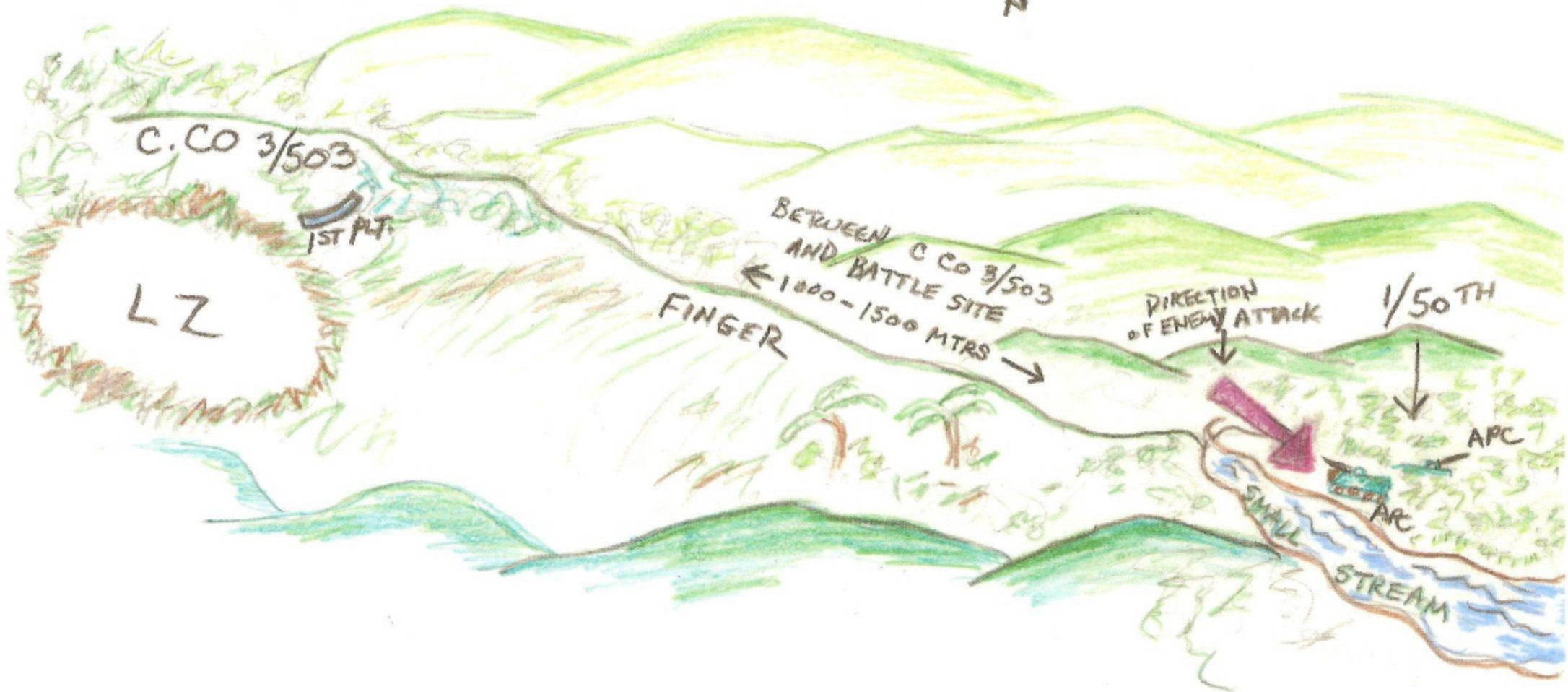
I have provided some sketches of the scene as I remember it. Maybe, from my vantage point, they will shed some light on the layout of the site. As per your suggestion, I did not read the historical account of the battle so as not to contaminate my memory of the event.

As a significant footnote to the above event, we did give some payback to "Charlie" the very next day (along with B. Co.) and it felt GOOD to work off some anger.

I can attest to the brave and valiant manner those heroes of the 1/50th fought that day! I would have given ANYTHING to have fought along side of them. If there's any doubt in anyone's mind about their bravery and tenacity in battle, tell them to see me.....and be ready to fight!

With deepest respect,

SFC (Ret.) Tarlon Mobley

SKETCH A



SKETCH B



DIRECTION OF ENEMY ATTACK

APC

APC

DENSE VEGETATION

SMALL STREAM

TO BATTLE SITE
1000-1500 METERS

FINGER

C.CO
3/503

1st PLT

LZ

