

DATELINE

40 YEARS AGO..... OCT TO DEC 1970

SP4 FREDRICK LEE FIELDS
25 MARCH 1950 - 30 NOVEMBER 1970

When the 19th received orders to deactivate, under "Operation Keystone-Robin", Brigade ordered all equipment to be brought to HQ for dispersment or disposal. We had small teams working from the Cambodian border to Qui Nhon, so convoys were set up to drive to each base and retrieve as much of our gear as possible. After 3000 convoy miles LT Spiegel, with Fred Fields as his jeep driver, left Battalion HQ for the last pick up which was "near" Ban Me Thouot in the central highlands.

It had rained all day and every creek and river was swollen through the mountains west of Nha Trang, which is the route all convoys took. On the way back to HQ the convoy was stopped at the Suoi Dau river which had washed out the road. A transportation company convoy was coming West, and the two head-on convoys were in a perfect ambush situation. LT Spiegel waded into the river to determine if it could be forded and, finding a shallow area, started directing the vehicles one at a time through the washed out area - first a Westbound, then an Eastbound, etc.

A Deuce-and-a-Half with a trailer went through the ford too fast, and the trailer created a wake which washed LT Spiegel into the river and quickly downstream. Fields jumped in to help his LT, Spiegel grabbed on to an overhanging branch of a tree and was pulled to safety. Fred Fields was lost downstream. It was later determined by talking to his friends that Fred could not swim.

All witnesses at the ford signed reports of their accounts of the incident and hopefully these are still on file somewhere. Tom Salvadore was two trucks away from the ford and saw most of what went on. His report was taken at Battalion HQ

It is quite possible that Fred could be the last 19th man to die in Viet Nam.

What Balls.

"B&R!".....Larry Jolly: D Company, 19th Engineers, January - November 1970

Provided by Tom Salvadore The following article was published in the "Pacific Stars & Stripes" on 29 December 1970.

"IT TOOK A BIG, BIG MAN"

DONG BA THIN, Vietnam (Special)

For eight weeks 1st Lt. David Spiegel had been leading convoys the length and breadth of Vietnam to gather the widely scattered equipment of his unit, the 19th Engr. Bn., which recently began inactivation processing.

His convoys travel over 3,000 miles, through dangerous mountain passes and over insecure roads, without mishap.

But tragedy struck on Spiegel's last convoy, only a few short miles from its destination, the 18th Engineer Brigade Hq., where the 19th Bn. is standing down. Torrential rains had washed out a road west of Nha Trang at the edge of the swollen Suoi Dau River. Spiegel was standing in the water directing traffic when he was swept away by the current. Spec. 4 Fredrick L. Fields dove into the torrent to rescue the lieutenant but both were carried downstream. Spiegel managed to grab onto a tree overhanging the water but Fields was swept under.

Spiegel later said, "The heroism displayed that day can never be measured in medals, That a young soldier gave his life to save mine has certainly changed my attitude toward life."

The action of Fields was especially heroic. For according to his friends, the soldier from Monroe, LA. couldn't swim.

Pacific Stars & Stripes, Tuesday, Dec. 29, 1970

Vietnam

15 December 1970

19th Engineer Battalion Inactivated

This year, 15 December 1970, will be the 25th anniversary inactivation of the 19th Combat Engineer Battalion, Vietnam.

The men & equipment of the 19th did not return to the USA, but were transferred to other units which were still active. The 19th colors were cased for the final time, and on 14 December, departed Vietnam for a small inactivation ceremony on 15 December 1970, at Ft. Lewis Washington.

The 19th was again reactivated on 21 December 1975 at Ft. Knox Kentucky. Serving proudly in Operation Desert Storm, the 19th punched over 200 holes in Saddam's berm, allowing the 1st Armored Division's advance into Iraq. In the next 4 days, the battalion constructed over 220 kilometers of road, several Arming & Refueling points, conducted extensive mobility support along the primary Main Supply Route, and constructed a 1000 man Prisoner of War Camp. Following the cease fire, the 19th destroyed over 200 enemy weapons systems and over 11,200 meters of enemy airstrip.

On 15 September 1977, the 19th was inactivated at Ft. Knox Kentucky.

A unit inactivated can someday be recalled to service. A unit Deactivated will never serve again.