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In Mid-August 1965, Da Nang Airbase, 6252nd Air Police Squadron, I was posted at a Da Nang Air Base flightline gate during the midnight shift. Around dawn, Vietnamese civilian workers would come streaming in toward their jobs in the ARVN and VNAF section. Rumors had it that a Village near the base had been hit by Viet Cong, and villagers were killed. Although no one knew the truth, I would soon have a glimpse of what may have happened.

The flightline access-gate was a VNAF access gate for the VNAF SPADS aircraft parking, and the ARVN QC (SVN National Police) interrogation compound including the Special Police Branch for civilian intelligence, which was fenced and secure. Rumors were in that compound it was also where interrogation of NVA/VC prisoners took place.

Generally, a QC (Quan Canh) and USAF Air Police guarded that gate-post together. I relieved the Air Force AP who got in the relief pickup and they drove off. The Vietnamese QC walked away without explanation. A little later, another QC walked over from the Spad parking area and said he was the QC for that night. His English was more than passable, and I recall his name was "Tran", but I don't know if that was his first-name or surname.

The night passed slowly and little traffic came through the gate, except for QC jeeps going in and out, and at AP truck bringing around coffee. Around 0300 hours, a QC jeep drove slowly along the Spad parking area and up to the flightline's inside-fence and stopped as if parking and with his lights out. After it was obvious the occupants weren't going to approach the access-gate, Tran walked over to the jeep. Several minutes later Tran returned saying the QC officer and NCO were waiting for a small convoy from some village to arrive. He also mentioned the NCO was a distant cousin.

A short while later, three ARVN duce-and-half trucks turned off the road from the main-gate area, then drove nosily toward the access-gate, kicking up dust. The first truck flew through the gate bouncing slightly over the road-transition from dirt to paved surface. The overhead floodlight lite up the truck bed and through its wooden slates I saw flashes of what looked like bodies. Then the second truck bounced over and I caught a clear glimpse of piles of Vietnamese dead...and they were dead: Startled, I tried to understand what I was seeing as the bodies seemed to flicker in a strobe-light effect: I recall what seemed to be a Vietnamese male laying on his back, head tilted, mouth wide open, eyes gaping; a young child's arm wedged against the railing; and jumbled stacks of tangled-jarring bodies, some clothed, some not, some limbs attached, some seemingly not. I stared at the incredible sight and failed to pay attention to the third truck playing catch-up that suddenly bounced forward as close as the buttons on the front of my jacket. The rush of wind scared the crap out of me! The third truck bed also had stacked bodies, but fewer than the first two.

The trucks raced through the VNAF flightline gate toward the *off-limits* ARVN Military Police compound, fenced by barbed wire, with the QC Jeep leading the way. I had a chilled-blood shock!

The dust quickly settled and I looked down and saw tire-tracks from the third truck were within a boots-length of my boot. I didn't trust my voice to say anything, realizing I had just come close to getting creamed in Vietnam by a SVN truck. I then noticed a dark trail and splashes in the dirt where the trucks had driven and bounced, and with heart pounding thought, "Those trucks really leak oil bad."

Within an hour after dawn, Vietnamese workers and ARVN soldiers began arriving for work. I was checking passes with QC Tran and noticed workers were staring and pointing to the center of the road. Tran waived through the same QC Jeep that had sat inside the fence hours earlier. A small Vietnamese boy, age twelve or so was in the back seat, which added to the unusual night.

The AP relief truck showed up and as I climbed into the back I then noticed the black oil stained trails were actually dark dirt-clod-globs and a muddy-ribbon of blood.

Riding back to Central Security Control, I asked if anyone had seen three trucks race over to the VNAF compound. No one spoke up, and no one volunteered any answers. It was nearly two-weeks before I learned what may have happened.

It was a horrifying and unexpected sight to suddenly see piles of bodies trucked through the gate, and was shocking enough that I was inattentive to the danger of the passing last truck. For me, nearly getting swatted by a truck in a sudden and close-call encounter with death was something I will never forget.

With time's passing, I think of the trucks with bodies whenever I hear a truck racing its engine, or see a truck-trailer with the fence-slat type rails on the bed. I also am disturbed by recurring dreams of this. I now wish I had been more compassionate at my first reaction to the dark-trail on the road, even though I was trying to process what I had just seen. My thinking the trucks were leaking oil was repulsive to me when I understood the dark-stain on the road was actually a blood trail. I was startled then and feel guilty today by my lack of real compassion. I think that may be why my dreams are so troubling to me.

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*That August night of 1965 was a mystery to me, as to what really happened. A few nights later I was again assigned the VNAF gate with Tran. I have been unable to confirm his story, but it is the only explanation I know of: Tran said a Vietnamese Village S/E of Da Nang had several villagers executed by the Viet Cong, and that most were parents and families of SVN military. He said the bodies were brought to Da Nang's QC compound to be exploited for any propaganda value, but that was discarded because it would have made the government seem unable to protect villages. Tran said the bodies were returned to the village.*