

Vietnam

Da Nang Air Base

6252nd Air Police Squadron, 1965

Scarlet Ribbons, Scarlet Dreams

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"It was a horrifying and unexpected sight to suddenly see piles of bodies trucked through the gate."



Mid August 1965, 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.



*Photo: VNAF Flightline, and
Civilian QC Intelligence compound*

The flightline access-gate was for the VNAF SPADS aircraft parking, and the ARVN QC interrogation compound including the Special Police Branch for civilian intelligence, which was fenced and secure. Strange things were rumored to take place in that compound, and it was also where interrogation of NVA/VC prisoners took place.

Generally, a QC (military police) and USAF Air Police guarded that gate together.

I had relieved the day AP and received his pass-on instructions. There weren't any. The Air Policeman got in the AP pickup and they drove off. The Vietnamese

QC walked away without explanation.

A little later, a QC walked from the Spad parking area and said he was the QC for that night. His English was more than passable. I recall his name was "Tran", but I don't know if that was his first-name or surname.

A night-shift is a long time to pass, and when possible it goes faster if you can BS with someone. Tran was talkative and told me his family came from North Vietnam when the country divided, and that he joined the QC to escape his mother who was trying to marry him off and get grandchildren. I told him that I was from Los Angeles (no one knew where Long Beach was), and he quickly asked if that was near Hollywood and if I had ever met any movie-stars. My "reel in the fish" flag went up and I told Tran I was friends with *John Wayne* who came over for hot-dog barbecues every weekend. He looked-hooked, so I added that *Marilyn Monroe* often came along for the ride and flirted with me but that I never got pass *second-base*. [That was a pretty good whopper considering she had died in 1962 :)]

Tran looked at me in silence for about thirty-seconds, then told me that he was *pals* with *Premier Nguyen Ky*, and *Ky* had told him he would pull some strings and he could be his driver--*IF*--Tran quit sleeping with his wife, *Madame Nguyen Cao Kỳ*, who thought he was good in a sleeping bag. Tran's pokerface was as neutral as a fence post-- *I guess it takes a BS-er to know one*.

The night passed slowly as we tried to out *whopper* each other without cracking a smile. I confessed to Tran that I had turned down running for Vice President with Kennedy because he wouldn't change to the Republican Party. Tran said he had been approved as the first VNAF B-52 pilot, but that *Madame Ky* nixed it to keep him around.

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, 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 who had already provided grand-kids for his mother.

A short while later, three ARVN duce-and-half trucks turned off the road from the main-gate area and drove rapidly 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 lit 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...and *they were* dead: Startled, I tried to understand what I was seeing as the bodies seemed to flicker in a strobe-light effect: *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 like a freight-train as close as the buttons stitched to the front of my jacket. The rush of wind from the passing truck was like standing by the edge a train station platform as a highballing train blasts through -- *It 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 (Quan Canh) compound, fenced by barbed wire, with the QC Jeep leading the way. I had a chilled-blood "*Wow did you see that?*" feeling!

The dust quickly settled and bugs renewed their orbit around the gate's floodlight. I looked down and tire-tracks from the third truck were within a boots-length of my right boot's toe. I didn't trust my voice to say anything, realizing I had just came close to getting creamed in Vietnam by a *frigging* truck. I noticed a dark trail and splashes in the dirt where the trucks had driven, and with heart pounding thought, "*Those trucks really leak oil bad.*"

Within a hour after dawn, Vietnamese workers and ARVN soldiers began their daily pilgrimage to work. I was checking passes with QC Tran, and noticed some workers approaching the gate on foot were staring and pointing to the center of the road. They held up their IDs without comment or being asked to, moved quietly through the gate.



Photo: QC Jeep approaches VNAF Flightline access gate.

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 Tran shouted, "*You Numba-Ten-Thou-Bull-Sheetter-John-Wayne-Me!*"

I replied, "*You Boocoo Dingy-Dau Numba-Ten-Thou-VC-Me!*" I then noticed the black oil stained trails were actually dark dirt-clod-globs and a muddy *scarlet 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 really happened.

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*It was a horrifying and unexpected sight to suddenly see piles of bodies trucked through the gate, causing my inattention to the*

*last truck. For me, nearly getting swatted by a truck in a sudden and close-call encounter with death, was a pucker-factor-squared.*

*With time passing, I regret my first reaction to the dark-trail on the road was being more concerned the trucks were leaking oil. Upon recognizing the dark-stain for the grisly macabre trail of blood it was, I am ashamed to say, I was startled but lacked any real compassion. I wish I had recognized the dead, whether Viet Cong or villagers, as fellow human-beings. That night it was a mystery as to what had happened to them. Within a few days I would learn from Tran what may have solved the mystery, centering on the boy in the jeep..*

### [The Boy in The Jeep](#)

I would like to hear from anyone knowing anything about what actually happened, or may have happened, in the above story, or if you experienced an unusual event at the VNAF access gate.

*We*

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