

# Vietnam

Đà Nẵng 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 Đà Nẵng Air Base flightline gate** (before I was reassigned as a K-9 Sentry Dog handler) 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 access-gate was to the flightline and VNAF Skyraider A-1H aircraft parking area, and the fenced and secure ARVN QC interrogation compound, including the Special Police Branch for civilian intelligence. Strange things were rumored to take place in that compound, and it was also where interrogation of NVA/Viet Cong 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.



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

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, when I was only 17.]

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 poker face 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 aircraft 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: 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 nearly 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. Nevertheless, the piles of bodies trucked through the gate had caused 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.

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 come 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."



Photo: QC Jeep approaches VNAF Flightline gate.

Within an 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.

Later, 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. I didn't know then that the boy in the jeep knew what happened to the villagers.

The AP relief truck showed up and as I climbed into the back Tran shouted, "You Numba-Ten-Thou-Bull-Sheete-John-Wayne-Me!" Even then, he was BS-ing me with pigeon-English (his English was actually pretty good).

I replied in kind, "You Boocoo Dinky-Dau, Doo-Mao-Me, Numba-Ten-Thou-VC Madame Ky-Me!" Looking down from the relief truck, I noticed the black oil stained trails were 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.

Decades passed, and I regretted my first reaction to the dark-trail on the road and being more concerned the trucks were leaking oil rather than about the villagers. 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 as fellow human-beings, whether Viet Cong or villagers. That night it was a mystery as to what had happened to them. Within a few days I would learn from QC Tran what may have solved the mystery, centering on the boy in the jeep.

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

*This memory was first written from diary notes posted in 1996. It was a horrifying and unexpected sight to suddenly see.*

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

*We Take Care of Our Own*