



Above: The Saigon river at dawn. Opposite page: The widow of Nguyen Van Lem, the man who was executed in the famous Eddie Adams image.

PHILIP JONES GRIFFITHS' WAR & PEACE

With 40 years of coverage, PHILIP JONES GRIFFITHS takes a long look at the highs and lows of Vietnam's constant flux. BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM



ALL PHOTOS BY PHILIP JONES GRIFFITHS

"WHEN SOMEONE ASKS ME," says Magnum photographer Philip Jones Griffiths, "Why do you take pictures, Philip?" I always say, "For history!"

The history Griffiths is best known for recording is the tragic history of the Vietnam War. Griffiths' 1971 *Vietnam Inc.* was a visual indictment of American imperialism in Vietnam that became a classic of anti-war literature, helping to turn the tide of popular opinion against U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. Now, 34 years later, Griffiths' *Viet Nam at Peace* (Trolley Books, 2005) chronicles the aftermath of that war in 550 tritone black-and-white photographs that possess all of the indignation of *Vietnam Inc.*

Organized both chronologically and categorically, *Viet Nam at Peace* begins by depicting the victory celebrations that took place after the fall of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) 30 years ago this summer. It then proceeds chapter by chapter to portray the hard

economic and political times that followed, the war's protagonists, the disfigured victims of Agent Orange, the Amerasian children left behind by American G.I. fathers, the boat people who fled Vietnam, the arrival of the American POW-MIA movement, the evolution of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the diversity of religions, the new life of Vietnam's waterways, and, perhaps most tellingly, the impact of Western consumer culture on post-war Vietnam.

Griffiths, 69, is now a distinguished, white-haired gentleman based in London, but he has lost none of the sense of outrage that informed his earlier Vietnam work. In fact, he is fond of saying that having been born and brought up under British imperialism in North Wales predisposed him to recognize imperialism when he saw it.

"I saw [the war in Vietnam] as an attempt by one country to impose its cultural values on another,"

Griffiths says. And he portrayed it accordingly, focusing not on combat action but upon the innocent victims of war, the peaceful agrarian way of life that was being swept away by the violence, and upon the horrors of war in general.

An anti-war activist with a camera, Griffiths arrived in Vietnam in 1966 convinced that photography was a way of shining the bright light of truth into the dark corners of history as it happened. His legendary Magnum colleague Henri Cartier-Bresson once said of his Vietnam photographs, "Not since Goya has anyone portrayed war like Philip Jones Griffiths."

Almost as soon as he arrived in Vietnam, Griffiths fell in love with the people, their way of life and the beauty of the landscape. But *Viet Nam at Peace* is not a pretty picture. Indeed, it is a decidedly anti-American picture of post-war Vietnam.