



PHOTO BY LUCIAN PERKINS

## Frank Johnston

### 2007 WHNPA LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Growing up the son of the Philadelphia Inquirer's chief photographer, Frank Johnston likes to say he was weaned on photography. It was a diet that satisfied, as Frank grew into a photographer in his own right, training his lens on history-making stories that included the Oswald shooting, the war in Vietnam, the massacre of Jim Jones' followers in Guyana, and Richard Nixon's resignation.

After stringing for United Press International while at the University of Pennsylvania and working as a Marine Corps photographer, Frank was hired by UPI in 1963. Sent to Austin, Texas, shortly before JFK's assassination, his photos of Lee Harvey Oswald's shooting went around the world. Presidential campaigns and political conventions followed, and then a stint as UPI Newpicture Bureau Manager and chief photographer in Philadelphia.

Volunteering to be a combat photographer for UPI in Vietnam, Frank was sent overseas in December 1966. He spent 13 months and 47 combat operations photographing the war. "The images are etched permanently in my mind," he says. The Vietnamese children haunted him. "I felt these kids were the future, yet their present was filled with sleeping on streets, begging for food, and hiding from combat."

Frank joined the staff of The Washington Post in October 1968 and went on to cover Watergate, space launches, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and every administration since LBJ.

When he got the call to go to Guyana in 1978, he had 10 minutes to pack and 45 minutes to catch his charter flight. He did not yet know they would find more than 900 followers of the Rev. Jim Jones dead in a mass suicide. Chosen as the pool photographer, he flew in with the Guyanese military, expecting to photograph Jones and his followers.

"However, I wasn't prepared for the sight I was about to see. As the helicopter approached the pavilion, it was surrealistic...



like the stop framing of a motion picture. I saw a little child lying face down between two adults—the searing image his tiny, barely worn sneakers."

Looking back on it now, Frank says it was his photo of a wounded Marine in Peace Church (An Hoa), under siege by the North Vietnamese, that affected him most. The Marine was sitting on the altar, a statue of Jesus on a cross behind his helmeted head. After traveling to the church in 1998 with Robert Sutter, an Atlanta man who believed the photo to be that of his deceased brother, Frank was called by another Marine, Mike Tripp, who said he was the man in the photo. He was, and Frank made an emotional trip to Atlanta to introduce Tripp and Sutter.

"In the newspaper business, we rarely have time to think about the impact our photos have on ourselves or our subjects. We seldom have the opportunity to know how greatly our photographs impact our lives. But in this case, after 30 years, I was fortunate to know the impact of that photograph on all of our lives."

Frank, who married his wife Nancy in 1968, was the first photographer to receive the Alicia Patterson Fellowship and spent a year traveling the U.S. to photograph social and economic change. His work appeared in newspapers, magazines, books, and textbooks. The co-author of two books, "The Working White House," and "Jonestown Massacre," he also contributed to four "Day in the Life" books: America, Spain, California, and the Soviet Union.

Named Photographer of the Year by the WHNPA in 1978, 1979, and 1985, Frank received awards from the Overseas Press Club, World Press Photo, National Press Photographers Association, Sigma Delta Chi, and National Headliners. The White House News Photographers Association is proud to present Frank Johnston its 2007 Lifetime Achievement Award.