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September 3, 2010

## **Wording of Vietnam's Declaration of Independence Subject of Communications between Ho Chi Minh and His American Colleagues in the OSS – September 3, 2010**

### **65 years Ago -While Japan surrendered aboard the Battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Vietnam Declared Independence with the words of Thomas Jefferson**

Most Americans do not know that it was on this date, as the formal Japanese surrender ceremonies were taking place aboard the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay, approximately 4 hours later, that Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence from colonial rule. He stepped up to a rostrum in Hanoi's Ba Dinh Square and, carefully borrowing the key portion of the precise text of Thomas Jefferson, delivered the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The English translation of this portion Ho's exact text is as follows:

*" 'All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness...'*

*This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free."* (–President Ho Chi Minh).

Most Americans do not know this history. They also do not know that Ho carefully worked over this portion of his text with his American OSS colleagues by communications with them from a shophouse in Hanoi's Old Quarter where he worked on the draft Declaration. Those communications were made by radio from the Old Quarter up to his OSS colleagues who were, at the time, still outside of Hanoi. When Ho delivered this his Declaration of Independence, some of his OSS colleagues were finally there in the crowd at Ba Dinh Square.



Ho Chi Minh at the Independence Day of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. September 2, 1945



Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap (in white suit) with American colleagues in the OSS "Deer Team" at Pac Bo

When Ho used the words, "All men...," the literal translation in Vietnamese is something close to, "from the same sack of eggs." Given the female leadership in Vietnam's history, (see, *Hai Ba Trung*, etc.), it is believed that Ho's word choice was intended to include women and minorities, departing from the narrow interpretation of Jefferson's "men."

Another interesting pinprick of history here is that elderly people (now) in Hanoi who were on hand to witness Uncle Ho's (as he is affectionately referred to in the northern parts of Vietnam) Declaration of Independence have told me that during the course of Uncle Ho's speech, they looked up in the sky above his head and could see the insignia on an American warplane flying overhead (to presumably witness this historic event or to show support).

We were friends with Uncle Ho then and today, he would be pleased that the United States and Vietnam are now friends once again.

Happy 65th Independence Day!