

CHAPTER
33**HISTORYMAKERS****Ho Chi Minh**
*Father of Vietnam***Section 3**

*"He was taut and quivering, with only one thought in his head, his country."—
French Communist who worked with Ho Chi Minh*

Ho Chi Minh spent his entire life working to win independence for his home country of Vietnam. He did not let anything stand in his way.

The Vietnamese patriot was born Nguyen Thanh in 1890. During this time, Vietnam was part of the French colony of Indochina. At age 19, he left for Europe to learn from the West how to defeat it. He took a job as a cook's assistant on a steamer. The ship brought him to Asia, Europe, Africa, and the United States.

In 1919, Nguyen was in Paris during the talks that led to the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I. He hoped to meet with American President Woodrow Wilson to plead for the right of self-determination for the people of Vietnam. However, it became clear that the right of national self-rule would apply only to European countries and not their colonies. Frustrated, Nguyen joined French socialists and wrote articles against French colonial rule. At a 1920 meeting, the socialists split into two groups. Nguyen joined the faction that called for the end to European colonialism. This group became the French Communist party.

Nguyen spent the next 20 years traveling and studying in the Soviet Union, Europe, and China. He organized a group of like-minded people from the colonial countries in Asia and called his party the League of Oppressed Peoples of Asia. However, he sometimes fell into trouble with authorities. He was arrested as a troublemaker in Hong Kong.

In 1941, Nguyen finally reached Vietnam again. He formed a revolutionary group called the Viet Minh. He placed all those fighting for independence under his authority. At this time, he took the name Ho Chi Minh, which means "Enlightened One."

Early in World War II, Japan conquered Indochina. Ho was pleased to see the French gone, but he "feared the Japanese wolf as much as he opposed the French tiger." He fought the Japanese even though it meant defying the Soviet Union, which had a nonaggression pact with Germany and Japan.

In 1942, Ho went to China to seek help. He was arrested as a French spy and held in a Chinese prison. He won his release by agreeing to supply the Chinese and Americans with intelligence reports on Japanese army movements in Vietnam. Japan finally surrendered to the allies on September 1, 1945. The next day, Ho declared the independence of Vietnam: "We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." He was sure that the United States—whose Declaration of Independence he echoed—would support him.

Criticized as a Communist, Ho briefly disbanded the Communist Party. He got the French to recognize his government, but by 1946 they broke their deal and sent troops to reclaim Indochina. Ho's forces finally drove the French out of Vietnam. However, a peace settlement split the country in two. Ho kept control of the north while non-Communist forces held the south. The agreement called for the country to be united in two years under a government to be elected by all the people of Vietnam.

No elections were ever held, and Ho's North Vietnamese Communist troops tried to win control in the south. In the 1960s, the United States entered the conflict in support of South Vietnam to try to prevent the Communist takeover of the country. From 1954 until his death in 1969, Ho's leadership role was gradually reduced. His goal of a unified Vietnam would be realized in 1976.

Questions

1. **Making Judgments** What do you think of Ho's idea of learning from Europe how to defeat it?
2. **Making Inferences** Why did Ho use words from the American Declaration of Independence when he declared the independence of Vietnam?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** How did Ho show his own independence?