

When Ho Chi Minh Was an Intelligence Agent For the U.S.

by Lloyd Shearer

DUBLIN, IRELAND:

Charles Fenn, an American intelligence agent who had worked for The Associated Press in China and India, recruited the kind, bearded old gentleman towards the end of World War II. Fenn recruited him in the Indochina cafe on Chin-Pi Street in Kunming, China, in March, 1945.

The gentleman, then 55, lived in a small, dank room above a candle shop. He wore Chinese-type cotton trousers and jacket and spent most of his spare time in "The American Office of War Information, where he read everything from *Time* magazine to the *Encyclopedia Americana*."

Fenn gave him the code name Lucius and agreed to supply him with radio equipment, a radio operator, arms and medical supplies.

In return, Lucius and his band of Vietnam guerrillas agreed to fight the common enemy, Japan, to rescue American airmen who were shot down in Indochina, and to provide the Americans with the latest intelligence. As part of the deal Lucius also asked to meet Gen. Claire Chennault, then commanding the U.S. 14th Air Force in China.

One photo, six pistols

At the meeting Lucius was gracious, diplomatic and said he wanted only one favor from the American general, an autographed photo. Chennault was only too happy to comply. Later, Lucius asked Charles Fenn for one further favor: "Six new Colt .45 automatic pistols in their original wrappings."

With Chennault's autographed photo and the six .45's, Lucius was able to become the leader of the Vietminh and to help rescue 17 American airmen.

In August, 1945, when the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Lucius wrote a final letter to Charles Fenn.

"The war is finished," he wrote in English. "It is good for everybody. I feel only sorry that our American friends have to leave us so soon. And their leaving this country means that relations between you and us will be more difficult.

"The war is won. But we small countries and subject countries have no share, or very small share, we have still to fight. I believe that your sympathy (sic) and the sympathy of the great American people will always be with us.

"I also remain sure that sooner or later, we will attain our aim, because it is just. And our country get independent. I am looking forward for the happy day of meeting you and our other American friends in Indochina or in the U.S.A.!"

Lucius was Ho Chi Minh, the Communist father of Vietnam, who died in 1969 and never lived to see his country united or at peace.

Runs artists colony

Fenn, 65, who now runs an artists colony in Schull, a fishing village of 500 in County Cork, Ireland, tells how he first recruited "Uncle Ho" into the U.S. intelligence network, how Ho operated behind the lines, how he was com-

pelled to fight on against the French and later, the Americans.

It's all in his worthy, objective, revealing book, *Ho Chi Minh*, which Scribner's plans to publish within the next few months.

"The first time I met Ho," Fenn recalls, "was on March 17, 1945, in the Office of War Information in Kunming, China. I kept a diary—extracts are printed in my book—which is why I'm so exact about the date.

"Back then I was an agent for OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, which was later to become the Central Intelligence Agency. My assignment was to work with another intelligence group operating in Indochina, a group known as GBT, from the initials of three Allied civilians, formerly employed by an oil company in Saigon. These three were L. L. Gordon, a Canadian; Harry Bernard, an American, and Frank Tan, a Chinese-American. They had superb French contacts and supplied the Allies with the best intelligence on Vietnam until the Japanese wiped out their French contacts. I was then ordered to replace those contacts with a Vietnamese network of agents.

"Kunming in early 1945," Fenn narrates, "was filled with Vietnamese—they were called Annamites—but we had been warned not to use them since no one seemed to know which of them were reliable and which were not.

"An officer I knew in AGAS, still another operational U.S. intelligence agency (Air Ground Aid Services), told me there was an old Annamite in Kunming who had rescued an American pilot downed in Vietnam, a Lieut. Shaw, and who also controlled a rather large political group in Vietnam.

Wanted recognition

"A meeting was arranged, and Ho came with a young associate named Fam. Ho wasn't at all what I expected. He had a silvery wisp of a beard, which gave him the appearance of an elder, but his eyes were bright and alert and all his movements were vigorous. We spoke in French. He told me that what he wanted from the Americans was recognition of his group, the Vietminh or the League of Independence, something which some of our OSS men had previously denied him.

"I remember asking Ho if his Vietminh group was Communist, and he said the French called all Vietnamese who wanted their independence, Communists. I told him something about our work and asked if he would be interested in providing us with intelligence on Japanese movements. He