

TWO SEPTEMBER

Mac Wellman
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Eighth Draft

Persons of the play T W O S E P T E M B E R:

JOSEPHINE HERBST, an American Writer,
OSS ONE, and
OSS TWO, two American Intelligence Officers in
Southeast Asia and China, in 1945;
HO CHI MINH, previously NGUYEN AI QUOC, a
Vietnamese revolutionary leader;
EMPEROR BAO DAI and several other Vietnamese;
and the three COLORS of the glorious
FLAG of France.

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The action of TWO SEPTEMBER takes place in
various places in China and Vietnam, before and
after the Japanese coup of 9 March 1945.

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Parts of this play have been adapted from the
following: WHY VIET NAM? by Archimedes Patti
and VIETNAM 1945 by David Marr; also, Elinor

Langer's biography of Josephine Herbst, and the latter's NEW GREEN WORLD.

No one can dig up a hole.

--American proverb

Note: The occasional appearance of an asterisk in the middle of a speech indicates that the next speech begins to overlap at that point. A double asterisk indicates that a subsequent speech (not the one immediately following) begins to overlap at that point. The overlapping speeches are all clearly marked in the text.

Scene [**alpha**]: We see and hear JOSEPHINE
HERBST.

JOSEPHINE HERBST

My name is Josephine Herbst. You wouldn't necessarily have heard of me unless you are interested in what used to be called "the left". I mean the "old" left. Remember that? Oh, I knew

all the famous writers of my time. They were my friends. Ernest Hemingway. Nathanael West. Katherine Anne Porter.... I spent my whole life working on behalf of the common man, and woman. I wrote novels too, and quite a lot of journalism. What I stood for is out of fashion now, socialism. But all this can change on the turn of a dime. And I know it will, because that is the way history works. Take the tyranny of the apparently triumphant. I am referring to the overproduction of virtually everything. Because it so happens that often, what is apparently triumphant runs out of steam. In fact, truth, justice and a humane social order are bound to replace the apparently triumphant if it is not based on truth, justice, and a humane social order. Sounds quite simple and it is.

I wouldn't talk this way, but the author of this little drama obviously feels a little intimidated to take on me and my time, and no wonder. Some day my books will be read again, and people will see just how true they are and, well, just how god damn well-made. I recommend the trilogy to start, PITY IS NOT ENOUGH, THE EXECUTIONER AWAITS and ROPE OF GOLD. After that it is up to you.

Now back in 1942, when America finally got involved in the war against fascism ... Pearl Harbor, surely some of you remember that? I had gone to Washington to get a job with the war effort. Archibald MacLeish had gathered a group of writers to become engaged with the government's information program, the Office of Facts and Figures. Somehow I ended up instead employed at

the Office of the Coordinator of Information, which was also known as the Donovan Committee, after its director, William J. Donovan.

Eventually this outfit merged activities with those of the Office of Strategic Services, run by a bunch of mandarin Yalies; men like James Jesus Angleton. Finally it became the Central Intelligence Agency, and we all know what that is.... I worked in the foreign radio operations section, run by Robert Sherwood, the playwright. I was on the German desk, and I worked on radio scripts for daily broadcast to occupied Europe. "Now it is my job to undermine what is left of the German will to live," I wrote in my diary, somewhat optimistically, as it turned out, since 1945 and VE Day proved some three years off. But the House Un-American Affairs Committee, led by Martin Dies had decided to focus on who was, and who was not, fit to serve the American cause. For instance, lots of radicals who had supported, and in many cases fought for Republican Spain were criticized and subjected to tough scrutiny. Malcolm Cowley had been driven out of MacLeish's Office of Facts and Figures along with someone from the Herald-Trib whose name I forget. On May 21, 1942 I had only been working on the German desk a few months when I returned from lunch to find my desk and locker padlocked. Apparently a grave security risk, I was ushered out and so spent the remainder of the war back at my house in Erwinna, Pennsylvania. I was suspected, according to Robert Sherwood, of being both a communist and a fascist, something he thought difficult to do at the same time. In any event, I

was not given a precise reason for my dismissal.

You can't dig up a hole, and history is full of them.

It turns out someone who I thought a good friend had been interviewed by the FBI, at great length, in Reno, Nevada, only a few days before I was excused from public service.

More of this informant later.

Around the time I was trying to sort all this out, and a half a world away, Ho Chi Minh, hoping to improve ties with both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party crosses the frontier to Kwangsi and is promptly arrested.

By 1944, the Kuomintang General Chang Fa-Kwei has granted him sufficient freedom to spend time at the local U.S. Office of War Information at Kunming. Ho's Viet Minh had helped rescue and return a downed American pilot.

Now to our boys, OSS officers, also in Kunming, China. Same outfit taking care of business back in Washington, D.C., remember? And the business they are taking care of is processing certain Vietnamese for undercover work in the war effort.

Lights change.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Who's this?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Who's this who?

FIRST OSS OFFICER

This old Annamite we've been hearing about, Hoo. Not only helped a pilot to escape, but they say is connected to a large political group in Indochina.

We see HO CHI MINH
at a table, reading.

Long pause.

Because I think he's paying us a visit.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Ho Chi Minh is the correct name. If he is who I think he is. He's made a point of doing what he can to attract American attention. Hence the return of the American flyer. What's more—

High above, a window is blown
open.

We hear the wind.

What's that?

FIRST OSS OFFICER

What's what?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Never mind. I thought I heard something.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Political welfare and advancement of oppressed people here in the orient. That's his agenda.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Our chief says we didn't rescue the French from German slavery to undermine their empire. Remains to be seen.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

-

Both stare at HO CHI MINH.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

What's he doing?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Reading. Reads everything from Time magazine to the ENCYCLOPEDIA AMERICANA.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

"Ho Chi Ming"- code name "Lucius".

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Sir, do you mind filling out this questionnaire? Very short questionnaire.

HO looks at him.

HO CHI MINH

Thirty five items?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Not so short.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
This one's unusual. He doesn't ask for money.

Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Ho Chi Minh is the name. Though he also goes by
Nguyen Ai Quoc. Also referred to as Comrade
Wong, Wang and as Ho Chi Ming, Ho Chi Ching.
He's a Vietnamese nationalist. Been in a Chinese
jail till recently.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
And now he's out? Why? Why did they let him
out?

HO CHI MINH
Excuse me. I am not sure how I am to respond to
item number fifteen.

FIRST OSS OFFICER reads out loud
"Details of Jap or collaborationist participation in
gambling, drinking, whoring or other vice."

Both OSS officers are puzzled.

HO CHI MINH
Perhaps this document was prepared for the
French, as the behavior described belongs more to
them than to us.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I don't know what to say.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Neither do I.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
He requested, and was granted an interview with
General Chennault.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
General Claire Chennault, of the Flying Tigers, who
gave him a signed photo.

The FIRST OSS OFFICER whistles softly.

And a request for a set of six, brand-new, Colt 45
automatic pistols, as appreciation for his efforts
against the Japs.

Pause.

HO CHI MINH
I'm going back to Pac Bo. With your permission.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I am deeply impressed by what you have told us,
by your sincerity and eloquence. And also by your
refusal to exaggerate the strengths of your group.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Okay. Okay. Send Frank Tan with him. Along with a forty-man armed escort. Twenty-five porter loads of sten guns, Thompson submachine guns and communication gear. Whatever we can acquire from other allied information agencies.

HO CHI MINH

Once we get there we shall carve out an airstrip in the jungle for your L-5 observer craft.

HO CHI MINH gets up and goes.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

You can get away with this as long as you stay out of politics. Ha!

SECOND OSS OFFICER

--

Both laugh.

JOSEPHINE HERBST laughs too.

JOSEPHINE HERBST

As if anyone can stay out of politics ever. Stay out of politics indeed. But this is May 1945 and President Roosevelt, who strongly opposed the reestablishment of French rule in Indochina, has died. President Truman has to face pressure from the old China hands in State, not to mention both Churchill and De Gaulle.

Pressure to undo Roosevelt's policy and bring back the old colonial systems.

Staying out of politics is something politicians only claim to do when they don't want you to know what their politics are.

She goes out and HO CHI MINH, looking very ill, enters and sits.

We are in the jungles of Northern Vietnam.

The OSS OFFICERS have been air dropped.

The FIRST OSS holds their parachutes.

HO CHI MINH

Your statesmen make eloquent speeches about helping those who need it with self-determination. We are self-determined. Why not help us? Am I different from Nehru, Quezon in the Philippines, even your George Washington? Was not Washington considered a revolutionary? I want to set my people free.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Malaria, dysentery and other complications.

With Sulfa drugs and quinine. He'll be as good as new.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I'm starting to get a little flack from Washington. I'm becoming uncertain about your status. As non-communist or communist or whatever.

HO CHI MINH
We are all united now. We will discuss politics later.

Long pause. They look at each closely.

Our hosts are of the Tay ethnic group. They believe I have worked a miracle.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Why?

HO CHI MINH
Because I told them to go to a particular clearing and wait for men "to fall from the sky".

SECOND OSS OFFICER
You can have the parachutes. You can use them to repair your clothing.

HO CHI MINH
Yes, the clothes are in terrible condition. But whatever the clothing, we want to make a country here, one country. That is why we refuse to use terms from the colonial time. Terms like "Annamite" and "Tonkinese". We are all one people.

Such terms are more tattered than our clothes.

Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

You listen to everything we say very, very carefully. Why so carefully?

HO CHI MINH

I want to hear you talk about your history, your political ideals, and how your President Roosevelt has offered official support for free, popular governments all over the world.

Long pause.

You are from Boston. Did you know I worked there, briefly? As a waiter, in a restaurant.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

At Headquarters, back in Kunming. We are starting to get pressure, from Washington. Not to get involved. The OSS still has cachet. Roosevelt prized our adroitness, but he's gone now.

HO CHI MINH

That is why I want you to talk about your own history. You must remind yourselves that you are a very great nation, and it is a duty of yours to help small nations to determine their own freedom

SECOND OSS OFFICER

De Gaulle has promised you self-government.

HO just looks at him

Long pause. End of scene.

Scene [**Beta**]: JOSEPHINE HERBST as before, at the beginning of the play.

JOSEPHINE HERBST

By the summer of 1945, Paris received from Kunming a dossier compiled by the Surete in Indochina which established conclusively that Ho Chi Minh was, in fact, none other than Nguyen Ai Quoc, founder of the Indochinese Communist Party and believed dead for thirteen years.

But we already knew that. He was also a founder of the French Communist Party. At Versailles, he was shown the door when he made the mistake of taking seriously Wilson's Fourteen Points, and in particular, the part about guaranteeing independence for the Asian colonies of European powers.

Back to our OSS boys as before. The SECOND OSS OFFICER has some papers in his hand.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Ho wants me to pass this along to the French Military Mission in Kunming. It calls for an Indochinese parliament elected by universal

suffrage, a French governor-general to preside until independence is granted in five to ten years, mutual economic programs, such political freedoms as are specified by the U.N. Charter, and prohibition of the sale of opium.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

—

They stare at each other.
Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I am also instructed to express the Vietnamese readiness to talk with a high ranking French official, either in Kunming or in Kim Lung.

The other just laughs.

After the Japanese coup in March it was all over for the French. Their "mandate of heaven ..."

HO CHI MINH off
... thien menh ...

SECOND OSS OFFICER
... has been revoked.

HO CHI MINH off
... cach menh ...

SECOND OSS OFFICER
The French don't understand, do they?

FIRST OSS OFFICER

They never will.

Pause.

We've dropped the atom bomb. The war will be over within days now, not months or another year like everyone was thinking. That's what I call a mandate of heaven.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
All bets are off now.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
We've blown a hole ... the fabric of history.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
It's what the Vietnamese call an "opportune moment". a "favorable occasion".

HO CHI MINH from off again
... thoi co; co hoi...

Now HO comes down and reads
us a letter.

Dear Lieutenant,

The war is finished. It is good for every body. I feel only sorry that all 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 and subject countries have no share, or very small share, in the victory of freedom and democracy.

Probably,
if we want to get a sufficient share, we have still
to fight. I believe that your sympathy and the
sympathy
of the great American people will be always 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 friend either in Indo-China or in the
U.S.A!

I wish you good luck & good health,

HO fades out as light come up
on the two OSS men. They have
the letter before them.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Signed: C. M. Hoo.

Oh, and guess who's trying to hitch a ride with us
when we fly into Hanoi? Jean Sainteny, the French
Mission officer here in Kunming. And, get this, now
that the flight's been postponed because of the
heavy rainfall he's going around accusing us of
sabotaging his mission.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

There's been a big demonstration in Hanoi, as
many as two hundred thousand people gathered in
front of the opera house. Speakers announced:
"Following orders from the Emperor, the Japanese
have ceased fighting on all fronts."

FIRST OSS OFFICER

But I hear the Japs won't surrender to the Vietnamese, They say to them, we won't surrender to you because you never defeated us, the allies did. They won't even turn over their weapons.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

They've got a point there, but it could take weeks before General Order No.1, on surrender dispositions can even begin to be carried out. In the meantime, the Japanese are pretty much in charge, as they were before.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

As if the war never ended.

Lights down on them, and
up on:

JOSEPHINE HERBST

Back in Washington, after I was let go, I made some efforts to discover the exact nature of the charges against me. Colonel Donovan, who had ordered my dismissal was, shall we say, uncooperative. Robert Sherwood was sympathetic, but what could he do? The matter was out of his hands. My friends stood firmly by me. Katherine Anne, for instance, said she was horrified and I believe she was.

Pause.

Several weeks later I did manage to get some idea of what was in the various anonymous accusations, including the longest and most extraordinary of

these, the Reno number, and what it came down to was, in its own way, remarkable. I was "reported" to have been a "pre-mature anti-fascist, that is, a person hostile to Germany before the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939; I was "reported" to have supported the Communist ticket of Browder and Ford in 1936; I was "reported" to have contributed to a banquet honoring Mother Bloor, et cetera.

Pause.

"I am reported," I responded, "to have protested against the violation of various civil liberties ... in the 30's.

"I am reported to have printed articles in magazines known to The Measuring Stick as 'Left'. I am grateful that during the last decade I was not confined to the Saturday Evening Post for expression.

I am reported to have been actively interested in the Loyalist cause in Spain, but in order to damn me they allege that I had taken part in a Communist Party broadcast from Spain.... My answer is: I would have broadcast from Spain under any auspices, including the Communist Party, in order to have one tiny chance of arousing people in England, France, and in the U.S.A. to the danger that threatened not only Spain, but themselves. History vindicates this position.

Pause.

Somehow this has to be brought out of the frame that the Civil Service has put around it.

Nothing sounds right within that frame. Everything is warped from its context. Actually now I see I'm on the stand for trying to be truthful all along. The actual communists would never have put themselves in such vulnerable positions. I always expected truth somehow to prevail and in the end it doubtless does. But in a session such as this, how can it? ... As I ... indicated to the examiners, it would be necessary to write a book to make the beginnings of understanding the truth, to interpret the workings of even one individual in a time so complicated as the time since the first world war and this.

How is one to make people understand?

Why is reaching out a hand, not to conspirators about to throw over a government but to such people as I knew them, doing this thing or that, defending labor or fighting fascism ... why is that a criminal act? What is involved in all this? Why are General Motors who deliberately preached Naziism in Lansing, Michigan during the last decade never investigated along such angles or the many people here in Washington, D.C. whose one virtue has been caution and selfishness and therefore are fit delegates for fascism once it swept before the winds?

The measuring stick. That is the place to quarrel, not with defending myself at all. They cannot accuse me of acknowledged acts which I shall not allow myself to regret.

Pause..

I was unable to write. My only source of income the rent on the Erwinna house. I traveled, first to friends in Chicago. Later I traveled west by myself, I had to be alone with my thoughts. Home in Sioux City. Seattle. San Francisco. Finally I had to relocate to Erwinna, on the advice of my lawyers. My former husband John was trying to have me evicted, and claim the property for himself.

There was no toilet, there was no tap water, there was no heat apart from the wood fires I, and a young writer who came to live with me, could provide. The title of the property remained unresolved by war's end.

Just after the Allied invasion, I had written in my journal: D-day at last. Rejoicing reported in Russia. Calm in London. General de Gaulle may land on the coast of France. Here the woodchuck ate my morning glories from my fencing for lettuce ... June 9, rain in the garden.

Black out. End of scene.

Scene [**gamma**]: Our boys (OSS) in Hanoi, listening to incoming messages on the radio. What they hear is both complex and confusing. In the background, we hear crowd noise and see a large Viet Minh flag draped on the upstage wall. SECOND OSS OFFICER begins his own brief transmission.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

August 22. As we entered Hanoi, I observed there were no French flags anywhere— only red flags with the five pointed yellow star of the Viet Minh. At the airport the Japanese major in command invited us to a nearby building where we were offered iced towels and cold beer. Later a delegate of the Hanoi City Committee greeted us. In response to his questions I replied that no, I did not anticipate the arrival of French troops; yes, there would be additional Americans coming shortly; yes, it was true I had met President Ho Chi Minh; and no, the United States does not support colonialism ...

The transmission breaks off.

Did that go through? Damn.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Poor Sainteny. One of his men was caught by the Japanese trying to slip into the city on his own. What kind of a welcome did he imagine he would receive there? Sucker ...

SECOND OSS OFFICER (transmitting again)

Banners everywhere, in English, Vietnamese, French, Chinese, and Russian: "Independence or death", "Long live Vietnamese independence", "Death to French imperialism", "Welcome to the Allies", and "Hurrah for the Allied countries arriving to liberate us".

Pause.

At the Hotel Metropole we dropped off Sainteny and his colleagues where they met with a group of French civilians who joyously greet Sainteny as their liberator, recount their sad tales of internment, and the killing of Frenchmen by the barbaric Japanese and Annamites. Only a line of bayonet-wielding Japanese holds back a crowd of hostile Vietnamese who occupy themselves with chanting anti-imperialist slogans.

Pause.

Vietnamese strong and belligerent and definitely anti-French. Suggest no more French be permitted to enter French-Indochina and especially not armed. That's all for now.

Signs off.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Get a load of this.

Hands a Vietnamese newspaper to his colleague, who reads it aloud.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

"Viet Minh fighting alongside U.S. troops in Tonkin

Will Soon Be Here to Oust the French Oppressors
Who Last Year Starved Two Million People".

FIRST OSS OFFICER

And, furthermore, they quote you here: "... the independence of Viet Nam is quite clear already; it simply needs to be consolidated". Don't you think, maybe you've given them the wrong impression of our policy?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

We're supposed to have some latitude, and as I understand it, this is President Roosevelt's policy.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

President Roosevelt has been dead five months. We have to be more careful.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I can imagine what kind of reports Sainteny will be sending to Kunming. I received this intercepted message just now from the Japanese liaison officer: it is a complaint against us, the OSS in general, for engineering "a concerted Allied maneuver aimed at eliminating the French in Indochina". He warns of a "total loss of face" for France.

But the FIRST OSS OFFICER is not listening. He has seen something he cannot believe: three young FRENCH WOMEN walk slowly downstage to much cheering. One is dressed in blue, the middle in white, and the third in red. It is a sentimental act of French patriotism in Hanoi.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

That's the first time I've seen a French flag since we've arrived.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Sainteny would say, if he were here: "Yes, mon ami, but I give you my word it will not be the last."

Pause.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

You know what? I heard this is the first time Ho Chi Minh has ever set foot in Hanoi. For three decades he's traveled around the world. Been to Paris, New York even. But never here, a hundred and twenty miles from where he grew up in Nhe An province.

Silence. We hear the wind blow. Silence.

Pause.

Both OSS become thoughtful and very still.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

What's that?

FIRST OSS OFFICER

What? What's that?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I don't know. Thought I heard something.

Pause.

I don't know what I'm supposed to say now.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
How's that?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Skip it. Just a little distracted.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Probably the fatigue.

Wind blows, fluttering a white cotton curtain, very high up. Both look, see the window is open.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Hey, what's that?

He (FIRST OSS OFFICER) gets up.

Pause.

Are you going to close the window?

FIRST OSS OFFICER
--

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I said: are you going to close the window?

Look, close the window.

FIRST OSS OFFICER snaps out of it, and finds a long pole with a brass tipped stud at one end. He goes to the window and closes it. Replaces the pole where he found it. Pause.

He stands quietly in the shadows.

What are you doing? Why are you just standing there?

Pause.

Hey! Did you hear what I said? Respond.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

For a minute I had the strangest sensation, as if I didn't know how to speak. As if something had taken my voice.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Oh, and I'm invited to lunch with them. Ho and some others (He reads): Vo Nguyen Giap, Truong Chinh, and our liaison with the Viet Minh, Le Xuan. Next Sunday, the 26th.

Pause. The FIRST OSS OFFICER stares blankly off.

I'll need a clean uniform. Maybe you could arrange that?

The FIRST OSS OFFICER snaps to attention.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Yes, sir.

Salutes in a highly formal way and relaxes visibly. The SECOND OSS OFFICER looks hard at him. He goes out.

Something odd happens. The high window opens and closes all by itself.

HO CHI MINH enters, looking ill.

Pause.

HO CHI MINH approaches SECOND OSS OFFICER and sits with him.

They look at each other for a long time.

HO CHI MINH

Perhaps you can tell me why Sainteny, the head of the French intelligence operations in China, is now in Hanoi through the good offices of the Americans?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I admire your frankness.

HO CHI MINH

--

SECOND OSS OFFICER

The French are here to minister to the needs of their POWs.

HO CHI MINH

That may be your purpose, but it is not theirs.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

They are concerned, somehow, in some small way, to save face.

Pause.

HO CHI MINH

To save face.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Precisely, to save face.

Pause. HO tosses some papers on the table between them.

HO CHI MINH

In the accounts I have read in our press, you are said to have reported: a) the French have no role in discussion between the Allies and Japanese in Indochina; b) the Allies are not assisting or authorizing French military return; c) the United States is well aware that Vietnam is a civilized country, not barbaric as still thought by some and hence incapable of self-government; and d) when the official Allied mission arrives to accept the Japanese surrender Vietnamese citizens ought to mount peaceable demonstrations demanding independence.

Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Ought *to be able* to mount peaceable demonstrations, is probably a more accurate statement of my intentions.

HO CHI MINH

This morning, at the parade, my colleague, Vo Nguyen Giap, in bidding farewell to you mentioned, if you remember correctly, that this was the first time in the history of Viet Nam that our flag has been displayed in an international ceremony, and our national anthem played in honor of a foreign guest.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

The OSS has been the creation of President Roosevelt, and its officers in the field have some leeway to interpret central instructions creatively.

Pause.

HO CHI MINH

My overriding concern is that the French, British and Chinese in tandem may jeopardize the independence of Viet Nam.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I can promise you everything in the way of my personal support.

HO CHI MINH

Your personal support only?

The wind suddenly blows open the high window which had been shut. The SECOND

OSS OFFICER is startled. HO CHI MINH does not notice at all. Indeed, his focus remains tightly on the SECOND OSS OFFICER.

After a few seconds, the FIRSTOSS OFFICER reenters and using the pole as before manages to shut the window. Once more he replaces it as before, and stands at ease in the shadows. Pause. Gradually the SECOND OSS OFFICER and HO CHI MINH relax.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

You have my personal support, and-- as far as I know at this time-- the support of the government of the United States.

HO CHI MINH

Very well. (Rising.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I am pledged to convey any message you may have for my superiors in China, and -- in Washington--; where I am sure they will be treated expeditiously.

HO CHI MINH

My lieutenants are concerned that my movements may have monitored by the Japanese security forces, the Kempeitai.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Clearly the Kempeitai are aware both of your whereabouts, and your movements.

HO CHI MINH

Then I am correct in assuming that the Japanese have no reason to forcibly intervene?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

That is our information. As for the French, it might be appropriate if the Viet Minh attempts to establish a direct contact with them.

HO CHI MINH

That is out of the question.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I would be willing to assist negotiations in any way possible.

HO CHI MINH

We intend to declare, by proclamation, our independence on September 2nd. There is no need to request permission from the French colonialists, nor in any way to suggest that we desire their approval.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I understand. I understand.

HO CHI MINH

-

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Perhaps it might be more appropriate if one of your colleagues, perhaps Vo Nguyen Giap, met in my presence with the French. I know Sainteny.

HO CHI MINH
I do not like the idea.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I have spent time with Sainteny. Believe me, he is painfully aware that the situation is extremely fluid. He knows too he possesses no authority from Paris to negotiate anything.

HO CHI MINH
I still do not like the idea.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
The French know you plan to announce a provisional government. Sainteny wants simply to lecture you, says he would be keeping "a watchful eye". Giap would be a good choice. Sainteny considers him "one of the most brilliant products of our culture".

HO CHI MINH
"Our culture", indeed.

Both laugh lightly and the FIRST OSS
OFFICER moves from foot to foot.

Very well. You can arrange the meeting.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I'll get right on it. With your permission.

HO CHI MINH
You have my permission. Even if the support you offer is not what it seemed when we first talked, and when I met the other major and OSS Deer

Team at Pac Bo.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I have always conveyed my respect for your informality, frankness, political sophistication and knowledge of current events in my dispatches to my superiors.

HO CHI MINH

Then I thank you very much for your continued support, especially as it is personal.

He bows. The SECOND OSS OFFICER also bows. HO CHI MINH slowly makes his way out, and we realize once more he is a far from healthy man.

Slow fade to black.

Lights up slowly on

JOSEPHINE HERBST

For a few years I stayed out of politics; made that conscious, if laughable decision. I did a great deal of research, and did a book on the life and times of John Bartram, the eighteenth century American botanist. NEW GREEN WORLD it was called, and everyone, including myself, was surprised by how successful it was.

She quotes from memory:

The little coterie of men who devoted their lives to what was known as natural history, for it included stones and turtles as well as trees and flowers, were whole men confronting a whole world, not

human beings floating in a cultural medium. When a man said "I" he meant exactly "I", not an ego, or superego lost in a soup of determinants. The mistake about the "I" only came later when by saying "I" one meant nothing but one's own fragmented self alone in a world divided into pieces, abstract and aloof.

Pause.

Who knows the exact origin of a book? A book begins with a writer's "I" even when the matter involves lives that seem disrelated in time and space to his own ...

... it soon became clear that the ingredient I wished to recover from that vast wilderness so passionately was not only a botanical specimen but the confident lost "I" of whole men.

These men whose lives I began to explore as Bartram had explored his wilderness seemed closer to stalks of growing grain in the field than we are.

War and fire might shake the collective field of stalks but what was left standing could be answered for. It could be defined. Today the point of gravity for responsibility has shifted from the small community to relationships between things. Experiences have even made themselves independent of men. They are to be found by turning the pages of a pictorial magazine or in the lazy isolation of one's living room by staring at the television screen. Over the air ways, in movies, experiences have come to be dogmatized to certain

kinds of experience at the cost of all others. If experience does not come from one's actual work who can say from whence it comes? With so many people interpreting experience whoever is entitled to his anger ...

Pause.

... who even is entitled to his, or her, anger? The world comes second hand-- or fifth hand-- to us and the illusion that it is fresh because it is shown as a picture of an actual place by some reporter divides man into incalculable parts without any true center.

I wrote that, not any damn spokesman for the measuring stick.

Lights down on JOSEPHINE HERBST,
as she walks over to where
our boys in the OSS are seated.

She looks at them. They look at her.

She goes out.

The SECOND OSS OFFICER hands something
to his colleague.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
It's his personal calling card, with a message
scrawled today.

FIRST OSS OFFICER reads aloud
"Urgent we meet before noon today. Please come if
you can. Hoo." What on earth do you suppose this
is all about?

Crossfade to Viet Minh HQ.

The SECOND OSS OFFICER is ushered
in and seats himself.

HO CHI MINH comes in, unhurried
and smiling. He shakes the other's
hand in a firm greeting.

HO CHI MINH

I was afraid you would not get my message until
late in the day. I want very much to talk to you
about some of our decisions and future plans.

Pause.

Tran Van Lieu, who has been received by the
Emperor, has shown me the Act of Abdication. It
will be read publicly tomorrow, and Bao Dai will turn
over the Royal Seal and Sword to a delegation from
the Provisional Government. I am elated. This is
the end of colonialism as we have known it, and the
start of a new era. Although perhaps the struggle is
not quite over.

Pause.

HO CHI MINH

The Chinese are coming, and the French are already
here.

Pause.

But this was not the reason I asked you to come here today. I want you to be the first to know.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

--

HO CHI MINH

On the 27th we convened our first cabinet meeting at the Bac Bo Palace and decided to formalize the Provisional Government and to fix September 2nd as Independence Day. On that occasion we will proclaim the people's independence, present the members of the Provisional Government to the people, and outline the government's program for all to hear.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I offer you my congratulations, and wish you all success on your great undertaking.

HO CHI MINH

I accept your good wishes, but there is a great deal to accomplish in a very short time. We have a committee that is working right now on the wording of the oath of office I and my officers will pledge. And the draft of our declaration of Independence needs polishing.

Another MAN enters with a copy and give it to HO CHI MINH. He passes it in turn to the SECOND OSS OFFICER with an air of self-satisfaction.

Pause.

The SECOND OSS OFFICER looks at the document and then back at HO CHI MINH with a little puzzlement.

Ah, I had forgotten you do not read Vietnamese.

He calls for a young ASSISTANT who translates for the SECOND OSS OFFICER.

TRANSLATOR

"This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776".

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Stop. You don't mean to say you intend to put that into your own declaration?

Slowly HO CHI MINH sits back in his chair, his palms together with fingertips touching his lips ever so slightly, as though meditating. Pause. He smiles gently.

HO CHI MINH

Should I not use it?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Of course. Of course. Why not. Only for an instant I don't know. I felt nettled. I felt proprietary, and I

don't know how to say this.... It's all very inane.
Of course you should use it if you feel it is
appropriate.

HO CHI MINH
But you reacted as though I should not.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Now I feel sheepish and embarrassed. Please, use
it. We should feel honored that you would be
inspired by our own Declaration of Independence.
Go on, please. Please. From the top.

He studies the SECOND OSS OFFICER
carefully, and then turns to the
young ASSISTANT, instructing him
to read.

TRANSLATOR
"All men are created equal; they are endowed by
their creator with certain inalienable rights; among
these are liberty, life, and the pursuit of happiness".

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Hold it, please. Could you repeat that last part?

HO CHI MINH
Why, is there something wrong?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
There's a mistake there, I believe. If I remember
correctly. Could you have your translator repeat
that last section?

Pause.

HO CHI MINH
Certainly.

He instructs the ASSISTANT to repeat
what has just been spoken.

TRANSLATOR
"All men are created equal; they are endowed by
their creator with certain inalienable rights; among
these are liberty, life and the pursuit of happiness"

SECOND OSS OFFICER
You've got it wrong-- you've transposed "liberty"
and "life". It should be "life, liberty and the pursuit
of happiness. I mean, that's how it goes in the
American Declaration of Independence.

HO CHI MINH
Why, of course, there is no liberty without life, and
no happiness without liberty.

He enters the correction into
the document himself, and turns
back to the SECOND OSS OFFICER.

You must help us. Are there any more places
where we have made similar mistakes? Please, it is
an important matter. It is essential that the
meaning of the document be as accurate and
truthful as possible. Please, you must help us.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
That's it. Really. Believe me. I know nothing
about constitutional law. Or anything related to the

law. Really. It's true. I am completely ignorant.
That's the only part I happen to be familiar with.

And anyway I am becoming a little uncomfortable.
I mean, this is your declaration of independence
and I'm not sure it's right for me to be involved--
even if slightly-- in the formulation, ah ... of a
political entity.

Pause.

HO CHI MINH
Never mind then.

Pause. Silence. Pause.

The SECOND OSS OFFICER rises to make
his departure, and HO CHI MINH rises
also to bid him farewell.

Would you do us the honor of attending a brief
ceremony with me on Independence Day?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Of course. Of course. Although I may not be able
to attend. It depends on circumstances, and ... and
well ... it may not be appropriate.

HO CHI MINH
I understand. I understand fully. However, you
will be welcome if you are able to attend.

Slow black.

End of scene.

Scene [**delta**]: A MAN appears, very regal and serene, before a podium. He begins to give a speech (everyone will think it is HO CHI MINH, as we cannot see his face clearly); it is the Emperor, BAO DAI's abdication. After he gets a little way into it, JOSEPHINE HERBST appears and focus falls on her, as the speaker and his speech fade out.

JOSEPHINE HERBST

That's the Emperor, and Japanese puppet, Bao Dai—not Ho Chi Minh. A few weeks ago he was proud to acknowledge Japan's help in Viet Nam in regaining independence. Using the flowery language of the Confucian literary tradition, he has just abdicated. There is some routine self-chastisement for his inability to drive out the Japanese fascists, along with an attempt to place himself, proudly, in the current patriotic and populist context. Don't worry, in a few months he'll be back, as a French puppet, in a rather nifty move to deny the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam and Ho Chi Minh any legitimacy whatsoever.

History is a threadbare fabric. As full of holes, tears and rents as the clothes of the impoverished people our boys encountered in July at Ho's headquarters near Kim Lung.

And a history, as a thing written, needs to have a start. What makes these times in Vietnam in the summer of 1945 so difficult to grasp, is that one order or system was ending, at least as a legitimate political entity; and another one was just beginning.

In NEW GREEN WORLD I wrote of the Bartrams, father and son, and their colleagues: The discovery of a new world, with all the astonishment, the widening horizons and the alteration of the world picture, was operative in their century as it had not been since the Renaissance.

The theme which had served as a lever toward political, religious, economic and philosophical revolution in the Renaissance was to work in new fields engineered by men who believed they had only to discover the laws of nature in order to bring order and sanity to the earth.

Old conceptions, blurred by superstitions and dread, were to be brushed off, turned about in the light and named.

The times called forth originality, courted diversity, called upon men to think and roam and to stand up for their conclusions. Love of country did not exclude the world.... The blood flowed around the

world in sacred wood sap and in the seeds of pine cones. For there was a grand design at work; respect for the glory of mentality. If men could not conquer death, they might manage life. All the monstrous, unmanageable things that men had not known what to do with this side of their experience, how to tame it, how to face it, this group accepted in its most benignant aspect of sheer wonder, unsolved miracle, potent might which might be bent to man's salvation. It was a period auspicious for such a breathing space; a time, for once, of decision and calm, a hopefulness casting so strong a ray that all the violent, the incomprehensible, was for a brief spell kept at bay.

Pause.

NEW GREEN WORLD, you see, was written as a kind of rescue work for myself, for it was during the McCarthy period, when I felt so sunk, that I decided to recall the intransigent Bartrams and their group of wonder workers. A time when the fabric of knowledge and being seemed not only continuous, but as newly woven, perfect, almost.

By the time I finished the book, deep in the cold war, and long after the events here narrated, the very real war in Viet Nam had devoured legions of names, and the fabric of order and system. At Dien Bien Phu, Vo Nguyen Giap who had discussed the kid's text book, A SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY, with our OSS boys at Pac Bo, had defeated the French once and for all. That was in 1954, the year NEW GREEN WORLD was published.

The French were out, the Americans were in.

Pause.

A lot of this is factual (the fabric's torn); but all of it is true.

She goes out.

We hear HO CHI MINH before we see him, behind him the platform is bedecked in white and red. The people on the platform wear white suits with neckties, and no hats, except HO CHI MINH. He wears a high-collared khakitunic and a wicker hat.

HO CHI MINH

All men are created equal. The creator has given us certain inviolable rights; the right to life, the right to be free, and the right to achieve happiness.

He stops short.

Do you hear me distinctly?

The crowd roars back: Yes!

These immortal words are taken from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a larger sense, this means that: All the people on earth are born equal: All the people have the right to live, to be happy, to be free.

Slow fade to black. Lights up
on the SECOND OSS OFFICER and
HO CHI MINH, as before at Bac Bo
palace. ,

HO CHI MINH

I must say that I am apprehensive of the future.
I would like to know, even on an informal basis
whether you have any idea what American policy
towards Vietnam will be, especially in light of
France's obvious intention to return.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

All I know is that President Roosevelt has on
numerous occasions stated a policy of no American
support for French colonial ambitions and no
interference in the internal affairs of Viet Nam. The
policy's still operative, as far as I know.

I will go one step further to tell you that since the
President's death no official statement by the United
States questioned French Sovereignty over Viet
Nam; but neither has the United States supported
France in any postwar plans for Indochina. As a
matter of fact, I know of no change in policy that
requires the United States to assist France to
reestablish by force its pre-1940 position in Viet
Nam. The position of the United States could
change if the Vietnamese people wanted the French
to return under one condition or another. However,
this is only speculation.

HO CHI MINH

You understand, then, my confusion regarding the precise nature of American policy intentions?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I think you are aware of my personal inclinations.

HO CHI MINH

Yes, I am. We all are.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

However, my instructions just before departure for Hanoi and repeatedly since then have been that American representatives in Viet Nam are to be absolutely neutral.

HO CHI MINH

I understand what you are saying.

Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

Irrespective of my personal inclination for or against a particular group or cause I have to adhere strictly to my instructions and perhaps at times my actions may have been misinterpreted by the various interests.

HO CHI MINH

It is difficult for me to reconcile the United States position in Washington, Quebec, Teheran, and Potsdam with its passivity in current developments in Saigon-- where pro-French and royalist elements provoked violence during the Independence Day celebrations.

I cannot understand how the United States, a champion of Anticolonialism can step aside and permit England and even China to assist France in its aim of reimposing colonial rule on Viet Nam.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

That is not our policy, as far as I am concerned.

HO CHI MINH

One would have to be blind not to recognize the fact that French troops, armed and equipped with American supplies, will soon attempt to reenter Laos, Cambodia and even the places they call Annam, Tonkin and Cochin China.

Pause.

It will cost them dearly if they do.

But if only the United States would exert its influence with de Gaulle a modus vivendi could be reached in Viet Nam in which not only the French, but all friendly countries could benefit from Vietnamese independence.

Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

I am curious; what made you decide which political, political path was the correct one for you?

HO CHI MINH

At my early party meetings there was heated discussion on such questions as participation in the Second International, the Third International, the Workers of the World Movement, and whether our

Socialist party should affiliate with Lenin's Third International.

I raised the naive question: which international sided with the colonials. A kind soul whispered. "The Third", and handed me a copy of Lenin's Theses on the National and Colonial Questions.

But how wrong we were ever to believe that the French, British or Russian communists would concern themselves with the Vietnamese problem.

When I was fifteen my father moved to Hue, and I attended school there. I became deeply offended by the Western attitude of the Headmaster, and some of the teachers. And later, on my first visit to Marseilles I found the usual seaport derelicts, gamblers, smugglers, prostitutes. But the French people of Marseilles treated me kindly, while back home the French treated the Vietnamese with arrogant condescension.

Later I traveled to Portugal, Italy and Spain. I saw several West and North African ports and visited the Congo and Madagascar.

Everywhere I went I observed the attitude of the white man toward the Asiatic or African black. It was the same in Viet Nam.

How sad.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I should be going. It's getting late.

HO CHI MINH

Carry back to the United States a message of warm friendship for the American people. I want Americans to know that the people of Viet Nam would long remember the United States as a friend and ally. We will always be grateful for the material help we have received, but most of all for the example the history of the United States has set for Viet Nam in its struggle for independence.

HO CHI MINH walks with the SECOND OSS OFFICER to the door, puts his hand on the American's shoulder.

Bon voyage. You are always welcome.

Black out.
End of scene.

Scene [**epsilon**]: Back at OSS Headquarters.
The OSS men are preparing to move back to China,
thence presumably to the U.S.A.

Silence. We hear the
wind blow. Silence.

Pause.

Both OSS MEN become thoughtful
and very still.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
What's that?

FIRST OSS OFFICER
What? What's what?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I don't know. Thought I heard something.

Pause.

I don't know what I'm supposed to do now. Say,*

Have we got a copy of the Declaration of Independence anywhere around here?

FIRST OSS OFFICER hasn't heard
What's that?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
The Declaration of Independence. Have we got a copy of the ...

FIRST OSS OFFICER still hasn't heard
How's that?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
Skip it. Just a little distracted.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Probably the fatigue.

Wind blows, fluttering the white cotton curtain, very high up. Both look, see the window is open.

Both stare at the window.

This came in while you were bidding a fond farewell to Uncle Ho. Straight from the desk of General Donovan.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

What is it?

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Our superiors in Kunming and Chungking. They evidently have a somewhat different picture of things here. Take a look at this.

SECOND OSS OFFICER reads aloud

"... OSS field representatives in Hanoi report the Provisional Government to be politically immature, misled by Japanese agents-provocateurs and communist elements, and inclined to use words like 'liberalism', 'democracy, and 'nationalization' without understanding what they mean..."

FIRST OSS OFFICER

One of my pals in Kunming thought we should be aware of the fact.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

But this isn't what I reported. What is this?

FIRST OSS OFFICER

This is what Donovan reported to President Truman, based on your reports.

SECOND OSS OFFICER

But this is not what I have been reporting.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

That's the point, isn't it?

SECOND OSS OFFICER

What exactly do you mean?

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Isn't the inference pretty clear, Major?

SECOND OSS OFFICER
I want to hear from you exactly what you think the inference is. And what our "pals" in Kunming want us to be aware of?

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Cool down, Major. Cool down.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
But this is not what we have been reporting; this has no basis in the political and social reality we have observed.

FIRST OSS OFFICER
--

SECOND OSS OFFICER
What? What!

FIRST OSS OFFICER
Don't be obtuse. Policy is changing, evidently.

Pause.

SECOND OSS OFFICER
This is pure hubris. This is the hubris of the French. And when they're finished. It will be our turn.

Black out begins.

FIRST OSS OFFICER

Did I hear you correctly. Were you looking for a copy of the Declaration of Independence? Did you want their Declaration of Independence or our Declaration of Independence? Because if you wanted our Declaration of Independence we don't have one on the premises ...

Lights out on our OSS boys.

Lights up on JOSEPHINE HERBST
who returns downstage.

Pause.

JOSEPHINE HERBST

Let me quote: "Informant T1 stated that HERBST at one time wrote a story for a magazine, name and date of the publication presently unknown, wherein she wrote: 'I went down with a bunch of farmers in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, not far from where Washington crossed the Delaware, and voted a straight Communist ticket.

"Informant stated that JOSEPHINE HERBST has a violent temper, a revolutionist attitude, and has caused trouble wherever the opportunity presented itself. She is described as having the utmost contempt for the American form of government and for the so-called American 'liberal'.... Well, I sure as hell do now, ah and this:

"HERBST is also known to have attended the scenes of several mid-west milk strikes ostensibly as a union helper".

That gives you an idea of the tenor of the thing, and from time to time all during the 50s the accusations kept popping up. But, as I mentioned before, I was unable even to discover the nature of these charges for years and years. Colonel Donovan, as I have also mention before, was uncooperative, though it was he who had ordered my firing.

Of the seven points listed in the document offered by informant T1, in Reno, Nevada, six have reference sources linked to Katharine Anne. My good friend, Katherine Anne Porter. Now, of course, I never learned anything about this till long after I was dead. And it's a good thing, because there would have been hell to pay.

When Katherine Anne and I finally did break it was over totally different matters: her reneging on a promise to review my last full-length novel, *SOMEWHERE THE TEMPEST FELL*, when it appeared in 1947; and also her silly and misguided attack on Gertrude Stein in *Harper's*, for which I could never forgive her. In 1962, her last novel came out; the book was not very good but it became a bestseller. In it there is not only no lovemaking, but no fornicating worthy of the name. There is only one Jew on board, and he is a classic stereotype. There is no historical specificity, only a generalized postwar sense of gloom and doom. The book was called *SHIP OF FOOLS*, and I sometimes feel like we all got on board. My career sputtered on thanks to a few, good friends. I was on the panel for the 1968 National Book Awards and talked straight through the ceremonies.

The Colonel Donovan who fired me, and the General Donovan who our boys in the OSS in Hanoi had to contend with are one and the same. William J "Wild Bill" Donovan. Won the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal and the Congressional Medal of Honor in the first World War. A war hero and attorney. A man like that must know what he's doing, mustn't he?

I died in January 1969; Ho Chi Minh in September of the same year. We lost the war six years later; fifty-five thousand dead on our side, over a million on the other; three trillion dollars of debt. And what good ever came out of it?

Pause.

The Measuring Stick. That is the place to quarrel, not with what the Measuring Stick measures; certainly not with defending myself at all.

She goes out.

Blackout.

End of play.