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RICHARD HALLORAN, NYTIMES:

WASHINGTON -- U.S. OFFICIALS SAID HERE THAT THE DEATH OF HO CHI MINH MEANT THE LOSS OF AN ALMOST MYSTICAL LEADER BUT THAT IT WAS NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF THE WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM NOR TO ALTER THE PROSPECTS OF FINDING PEACE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS IN PARIS. SOURCES CLOSE TO THE VIETNAM SITUATION SAID HERE THAT THE MOST IMMEDIATE IMPACT WOULD BE THE LOSS OF LEADERSHIP THAT HAS BEEN EMBODIED IN HO CHI MINH, THE NATIONALIST, THE FIGHTER FOR VIETNAMESE INDEPENDENCE AND THE POETIC REVOLUTIONARY.

HE HAS BEEN SUCH A FIGURE FOR MANY OF THE VIETNAMESE FOR A HALF-CENTURY SINCE HE APPEARED AT THE VERSAILLES PEACE CONFERENCE IN 1919 TO SEEK MORE RIGHTS FOR HIS COUNTRYMEN WHO WERE THEN LIVING UNDER FRENCH COLONIAL RULE...

HIS QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP CANNOT BE PASSED ON, IT IS THOUGH HERE, AND THUS THE FUTURE COHESION OF NORTH VIETNAMESE LEADERSHIP IS IN DOUBT. IT IS THOUGHT PROBABLE THAT A COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AS IN THE SOVIET UNION AFTER THE DEATH OF STALIN, WILL EMERGE. IN THE SOUTH, IT IS THOUGHT, THE U.L.F. MAY WELL HAVE LOST THEIR MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF APPEAL FOR THE ALLEGIANCE- OR AT LEAST THE NONRESISTANCE - OF THE PEASANTRY. "UNCLE HO," AS HE WAS WIDELY KNOWN, WAS REGARDED BY FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE AS A SYMBOL OF VIETNAMESE ASPIRATIONS.

IDEOLOGY HAS LITTLE IMPORTANCE AMONG THE RURAL PEOPLE OF VIETNAM BUT THE FIGURE OF HO CHI MINH AS THE BENEVOLENT AND PATERNAL PROTECTOR HAS BEEN HIGHLY RESPECTED.

AN AMERICAN MARINE GENERAL, ACKNOWLEDGING THIS, ONCE MUSED THAT HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND VIETCONG CONTINUED THEIR STRUGGLE AGAINST THE MILITARY MIGHT OF THE U.S. WHEN ALL THEY HAD TO DO TO TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY WAS TO STOP FIGHTING AND AGREE TO ELECTIONS. HE SAID PRESIDENT HO WAS SO POPULAR THROUGHOUT VIETNAM THAT HE WOULD HAVE WON ANY ELECTION HANDS DOWN.

SOME OFFICIALS HERE ARE NOT SO SURE THAT PRESIDENT HO'S DEATH WILL BE A GREAT LOSS FOR THE VIETCONG IN THE SOUTH. THEY ARGUED THAT THE NEW LEADERS IN HANOI COULD BE EXPECTED TO INVOKE THE MEMORY OF PRESIDENT HO AND CONTINUE TO USE HIS NAME AS THE SYMBOL OF THEIR CAUSE.

(END FS MATERIAL NOT FOR PUBLICATION). ITEM.

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HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR ON MICROFILM