

One Man Air Force Synopsis

September 1948

26 September 1988 - Jakarta Post Newsroom Sabam Siagian, managing editor of the Jakarta Post, assigns Cameron, an American graduate student on a internship, to interview his friend Petit Muharto about his experiences running the Dutch blockade with Bob Freeberg.

28 September 1988 - Muharto living room Cameron meets Muharto, a dapper, energetic Indonesian man in his late sixties, at his tidy residence in a Jakarta suburb. Muharto recounts his exploits in RI-002 in such vivid detail that Cameron can clearly visualize the events Muharto is describing starting with a surprise telephone call he received at Maguwo Airbase in Jogjakarta on June 1947.

1 June 1947 - Muhartos office Maguwo Muharto receives a telephone call in Air Force headquarters in Jogja from an army base in Tasikmalaya to report that a foreign pilot has landed on a remote beach nearby and asked for Muharto by name. Suryadarma, the Air Force commander, sends Muharto there to investigate.

7 June 1947 - In the air Flying to Tasik in a refurbished Japanese aircraft, whose pilot had only first seen an airplane a few months previously, Muharto takes his mind from possible catastrophe by recollecting his experiences during his blockade runs three months previously, wondering which pilot it might be.

31 March 1947 - CALI aircraft cockpit On the third blockade run, with Bob Freeberg as captain, the overcast sky forces Muharto to navigate by asking Bob to fly low enough to follow the railway line to Jogja.

31 March 1947 - Maguwo airfield In Jogja, Muharto introduces Bob to Suryadarma, who thanks the American for his assistance, and asks him to perform some risky tasks on the return leg. Bob grins and readily agrees.

31 March 1947 - Karangendah Airfield Muharto asks Bob to make a test landing on a refurbished wartime airstrip designed for smaller aircraft such as fighters. Bob happily complies, and sets the Dakota down with only a few meters to spare on the runway. Muharto introduces Bob to Santoso, the base commander.

31 March 1947 - CALI Dakota cockpit Bob uses his wartime aviation skills to parachute Air Force engineers and their gear to a bull's eye landing on a pot-holed highland airstrip they are tasked to refurbish.

8 June 1947 - Tasik Army Base In Tasik Muharto meets Pang Soeparto, the junior army officer who telephoned him, who takes him (and two barrels of aviation fuel) to the beach at Cikolong. As soon as Muharto sees the beach, bookended by two rivers and the gap between the water and palm trees scarcely more than the Dakota's wing span, he knew that, of all the pilots he had met, only Bob Freeberg had the skill to make that landing.

9 June 1947 - Cikolong Beach Bob tells Muharto that his Dakota is stuck in the soft sand. Muharto rallies the hundreds of villagers who have gathered for the spectacle of the foreigner and his giant aircraft to tear apart their houses and use the woven bamboo walls as a makeshift runway. The Dakota takes off with Muharto on board and heads to Jogja.

9 June 1947 - Maguwo Airfield Jogja In Jogja, Suradarma commissions Bob to fly a cargo valuable quinine to Manila and return with medicine and other goods. To forestall possible problems with authorities in Manila Muharto suggests that they paint a registration number, RI-002, on the unregistered war-surplus Dakota.

October 1947 - Presidential Palace Jogja Muharto takes Bob to meet Soekarno . At the presidential palace. As was his custom in private conversation, Soekarno treats Bob as an equal and urges him to stay and help the struggle.

17 October 1947 - RI-002 in flight Bob drops paratroopers into the Kalimantan forest. This is the first time in an aircraft for all, so Bob gives a pep talk to the terrified troopers, translated by Boedi.

November 1947 - Hotel Merdeka Dining Room Jogja On the day the GOC members leave Jogja, Bob invites Boedi and Muharto to join him for dinner at the Hotel Merdeka. He is embarrassed when a waiter insists he be served the last can of American corned beef left behind by visiting United Nations officials.

30 November 1947 - RI-002 at Maguwo Freeberg, Muharto and Boedi fly Republican economists and other experts to Manila to meet with United Nations representatives in the hill town of Baguio. The delegates, who are all prominent figures in the Republic and have cosmopolitan backgrounds, treat Bob with as much respect as do the hero-worshipping common people of Jogja.

28 September 1988 - Muhartos Living Room Muharto tells Cameron that he flew with RI-002 until May 1948, when he was promoted to Major and assigned to a desk at headquarters. He saw little of Bob after that, but was looking forward to having Bob as guest of honor at his wedding in October. But three weeks before the wedding he was devastated to learn that RI-002 had vanished on a mission.

28 September 1988 - Muhartos living room Muharto explains that he

became aware of the discovery of the crash site, wholly by accident, some five years previously. He wrote to his contacts in the Air Force and to the officers who participated in the crash-site investigation, but received vague, non-committal replies --- or only silence.

19 April 1977 - Mount Punggur An Air Force team investigating the crash site find a few human remains, confirmation that it was RI-002, but no sign of the gold cargo.

29 July 1977 - Teluk Betulu Air Force base In an otherwise empty hanger, five coffins draped in Indonesian flags lay on a platform. A sixth coffin, larger than the rest and without a flag, rests on a separate platform. A flatbed truck pulls in to the hanger and a squad of airmen, all silent and respectful pick up each of the coffins and place them on the truck. But they leave the sixth coffin where it lies as the truck pulls away.

28 September 1988 - Muharto's Living Room Muharto tells Cameron that the sixth coffin, presumably containing Bob's remains, could not be buried with the others as a foreigner cannot be interred in a cemetery for national heroes, however much he may deserve the honor himself through his services to the nation.

Muharto's expression as he finished his reminiscences convinces Cameron that he regarded Freeberg as a close friend, and is seeking closure about his mysterious disappearance. Muharto finishes by saying, wistfully, that his is sure many people know more about the mystery of RI-002 than they are telling.

29 September 1988 - Jakarta Post Newsroom Syd Jardine, a burnt-out Old Asia Hand who is senior copy editor for the Jakarta Post, tells Cameron that his story on Bob Freeberg needs more historical context, and suggests he do additional research at the new National Library, a modern, well-run institution that he visits regularly.

5 October 1988 - Library Reference Section At the National Library, Cameron is assisted by Julia, a bookish, attractive final-year student assigned to deal with foreign researchers because of her fluent English.

February 1948 - Bukittinggi In **Recruit to Revolution**, John Coast describes Freeberg as "America's Best Ambassador" after their first meeting. Nevertheless, he notes that American officials in Batavia, who wanted Indonesia to remain in Dutch hands, disapproved of his activities.

5 October 1988 - library canteen Julia and Cameron have coffee in the library canteen. She says that she is in her final year of university, and hopes to get a scholarship to do her post-grad overseas. In the meantime, she was hired by the library because of her fluency in written English and Dutch. Julia also casually mentions that her father is a general.

3 October 1988 - JP newsroom The day the story about Bob Freeberg appears, Sabam berates Syd for sneaking an amusing tone-perfect translation

of a lurid sex-crime story from a local paper into the Post. He then praises Cameron for the Muharto story, saying that his old friend was delighted. When Sabam leaves, Cameron turns to Syd and says he is intrigued by the story, and wants to return to the Library for further research. With a smile and a wink, Syd tells Cameron to give his regards to Julia.

October 1988 - National Library At the library, meets Victor, a retired journalist for the colonial-era **Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad**. He relates humorous anecdotes of the frustration of colonial authorities with foreign blockade runners like Bob Freeberg, who they regarded as common criminals.

October 1988 - Library parking lot When the library closes, Cameron and Julia discover that they each have arrangements to meet friends at the nearby Hotel Borobudur. He offers her a ride on his vintage Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

October 1988 - Hotel Borobudur Cameron drops Julia at the front entrance to the hotel, impressing her friends, who decides that he must be rich.

3 October 1988 - Muharto living room Cameron visits Muharto to help solve the mystery of RI-002. Muharto is delighted, and suggest they begin with a visit to Jogjakarta, where pieces of the RI-002 wreckage is kept.

October 1988 - Mount Merapi Cameron accompanies Muharto to a village on the upper slopes of the Merapi volcano to meet Muharto's spiritual advisor, Mbah Maridjan. The three hike the steep incline to a shrine, effortlessly in the case of the sexagenarian duo, but with some difficulty by their companion, some four decades their junior. Cameron watches respectfully as the two intone Islamic prayers, then lay Hindu-style floral offerings at the shrine to the gods of the fire mountain.

16 October 1988 - Aviation Museum Jogjakarta Muharto takes Cameron to the Air Force museum in Jogja, a re-purposed hanger filled with decommissioned aircraft and other exhibits, which stir vivid memories of Muharto. In the curator's office, Muharto handles the dynamo with the bullet lodged in the windings, and has a mystical vision of RI-002 in the seconds before the crash.

1 November 1988 - JP Newsroom Syd complains about the quality of the financial articles produced by the JP reporters in the run up to capital market deregulation. Sabam decides to assign Cameron to interview foreign financial experts and write incredited background articles.

October 1988 - Boedi living room Cameron meets Boedi when he hosts a reception for visiting academics, and discovers that he had been radio operator of RI-002. At Cameron's urging, he tells amusing anecodes of his days with RI-002 to his guests.

10 July 1947 - RI-002 cockpit in flight Bob invites Muharto to sit in co-pilot seat and assist him with the flap controls during the final approach to Manila. But when Bob gives the command, the nervous Muharto pushed the levers to the full causing the Dakota to make a dramatic drop. Bob instantly repositions

the levers, and gently reminds Muharto to not pass the half-flaps setting until they see the runway.

12 June 1947 - Tom Lee Kitchen Over breakfast at Tom Lee's house, Tom reads the newspaper headlines about "Fearless Bob Freeberg" and his "Javanese Crew". One article reports that the Dutch are laying claim to the valuable quinine cargo as the "Javanese Crew" are "subjects of the Dutch Queen". Boedi laughs, but Muharto is outraged.

20 June 1947 - courtroom Manila Bob and Muharto attend their first court session to decide who owns Dutch representatives take them to court over possession of the quinine cargo.

21 September 1947 - RI-002 cockpit in flight RI-002 returns to Jogja, flying non-stop to conceal the presence of Captain Espina. They reach Java after dusk, with landmarks difficult to discern in the gloom. After some hesitation, during which tension rises in the cockpit, Muharto draws upon a vivid schoolboy memory to identify a range of hills and guides the aircraft to Jogja.

October 1988 - Tanamur Julia and Cameron party with her friends at the Tanamur. The friends want to go next to an after-hours place, where girls are admitted free but men must pay a steep cover charge. Because of his tight budget, Cameron must demur, and Julia is embarrassed for her new friend.

October 1988 - Hotel Hilton Julia goes on a date with Eric, the son of a friend of her father, a successful businessman. Eric reveals that their fathers are joining forces with an American venture capitalist to artificially inflate the value of his father's company for the sale on the capital market.

October 1988 - Julia House The day after her date with Eric, General Eddy hints that the business deal with Eric's father will provide him with enough funds to send Julia to graduate school in America, fulfilling her dream.

September 1947 - Madras Curry Manila Muharto attempts to pay for their meals at Madras Curry, explaining that it is an honorarium for the talk to the lady lawyers. To his surprise, Bob chastises him for "taking money for nothing".

August 1947 - AB Bar Manila Bob Walters complains to Boedi about his business dealings with Bob Freeberg.

October 1947 - Bangkok Bob flies two Indonesian aviators to Bangkok, who will purchase RI-003 and fly it back to Jogja. Bob is detained by Thai authorities at the insistence of Dutch diplomats, but is released soon afterward in a tacit recognition of the legitimacy of the new Republic of Indonesia.

December 1947 - RI-002 During a routine radio contact with Jogja, Boedi is told that Ining and Mas Ded were found dead of gunshot wounds at Ining's house. Muharto reports the incident to Major Primitivo, who accuses Muharto of being a communist and Mas Ded being complicit in Ining's death.

November 1988 - Caltex Office Cameron interviews Julius Tahija, who admires his writings about the capital market and so is open and opinionated. At the end of the interview, Cameron asks about his experiences as adjutant to General Spoor.

January 1948 - KNIL Headquarters Julius witnesses Spoor raging about the news that RI-002 seemingly had assisted Espina to smuggle guns into Indonesia. He vows to end the blockade runs by any means necessary.

November 1988 - Tanamur Back Bar Cameron and Julia disagree.

April 1948 - Manila At a party in Manila, Muharto is appalled when one of Bob's housemates boasts of shooting down own squad leader. He decides to not tell Bob of his plan to smuggle gems into Manila to be traded for sidearms.

April 1948 - Manila Airport Filipino commandos enter RI-002 and open a compartment under the floorboard of the flight deck, taking out a bag of gems. But they hear the approach of a guard, and hurry out, leaving the hatch cover slightly ajar.

April 1948 - Manila Airport Bob enters the RI-002 cockpit and immediately discerns that someone had been there the previous night. He angrily confronts Muharto.

30 May 1948 - Bukittinggi The starboard landing gear collapses just as RI-002 is about to take off. Nevertheless, Bob and the airstrip crew right the craft, repressurize the hydraulics, and take off as Dave Fowler shakes his head in dismay.

June 1948 - RI-002 cockpit During the Soekarno Tour, Bob refuses Soekarno's order to land on what Bob judged to be an unsafe runway. Soekarno insists, saying: "To as I say. I'm the president!" Bob replies, in a measured tone: "Indeed, sir. Down there you are the president. But up here, I'm the captain."

June 1948 - Sumatra Airfield Soekarno gives a speech near where RI-002 had landed. Soekarno points to Bob resting in the shade with Boedi under a wing and says: "Here is a foreigner, but he is on our side."

November 1948 - Library Cameron receives a lengthy letter from Dave Fowler through Frank Reuneker. He reads it to Julia.

September 1948 - Hotel Merdeka Over whiskey with Fowler, Muharto, and Boedi at Hotel Merdeka, Bob complains about Suryadarma and some of his staff, saying they want this or that but never follow through. He says that many Indonesians (present company excepted) would cut off their nose to spite their face.

**** - **** While flying a group of international journalists to Jogja under cover of darkness, Fowler believes he spots fighter planes tailing him while his radio operator hears traffic on Dutch military frequencies. When he looks again, the fighters are gone.