



ONE MAN AIR FORCE



**Petit Muharto
Kartodirdjo**
with Jeremy Allan

Bob Freeberg, RI-002, and Indonesia's Struggle for Freedom

ONE MAN
AIR FORCE







afterhours

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PETIT MUHARTO KARTODIRDJO WITH JEREMY ALLAN

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PREFACE

BY JEREMY ALLAN

A charismatic Western adventurer stumbles into a remote Asian territory and joins forces with local inhabitants in their struggle against warlords, bandits—or his own nation's colonial oppressors. This story has been told, time and again, in the crisp pages of serious novels and the lurid panels of comic books. But whether literary masterpiece or paperback potboiler, in these tales the “natives” only serve to provide local color, and their struggle for freedom simply a backdrop for the exploits of the “hero”.

I was introduced to one such story in 1986, when I researched the early years of aviation in Indonesia for a series of articles connected with Indonesia's first international air show. The highlight of my research as a wide-ranging and fascinating interview with retired Indonesian Air Force Major Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo. I sat in his living room, enthralled, as he related his swashbuckling adventures as the co-pilot of RI-002, a war-surplus C-47 freight airplane owned by a veteran US Navy air ace, Bob Freeberg, as they ran the air blockade set up by the Dutch to isolate the newly declared Republic of Indonesia from outside support. Since each mission had been the direct responsibility of the Indonesian Air Force, Captain Petit Muharto had served as mission leader and so had sat in the right-hand seat as the nominal co-pilot, though he had yet to complete flight school. Muharto had flown almost every mission of RI-002 until promoted to Major and assigned to administrative

duties at headquarters. Four months later, RI-002 vanished, along with Freeberg, his crew, and a quarter ton of gold bullion being transported for safekeeping in the remote highlands of Sumatra.

I would encounter the story again in 2009, during the course of a five-day bicycle ride from Jakarta to Jogjakarta. Nightfall on the third day found me at a beach resort on the southwest coast. I soon realized that coincidence had brought me to the same beach where, six decades before, a huge cargo craft had swept over the mountains and landed a few dozen meters from the spot where I now enjoyed a delicious grilled-fish dinner. On that evening in June 1947, Bob Freeberg had lost his way among the mountains of West Java and been forced to make an emergency landing with only a few liters of fuel in his tanks.

While blogging my ride in Jogjakarta several days later, I searched for images of Freeberg that I had seen in archival collections a quarter century before, and that might have made their way into cyberspace. Indeed, among a number of blog posts relating to the Indonesian Revolution I found the dramatic shot of Freeberg's aircraft lifting off from the beach as the improvised runway of meter-square bamboo mats scattered in the propeller backwash. I e-mailed the person who uploaded the image, mentioning the name Petit Muharto.

This person soon wrote back, asking: "How did you know my father?" My correspondent was Eko Muhatma Kartodirdjo, Petit Muharto's eldest son. I replied with the details of my long-ago encounter with his father. Eko responded immediately, the astonishment seeming to leap from the words on the screen as I read: "So you're that guy!"

When we met in Jakarta a few weeks later, Eko told me that his father had been delighted with my profile of Bob Freeberg, and had shown the article to numerous friends and colleagues. However, in doing so he had arrived at the appalling realization that few

of his compatriots, though highly educated and conversant with Indonesian history, were aware of the story of Freeberg and his services to their nation. This experience led Muharto to write his own recollections for other Indonesian publications, and then, on his retirement, to devote his time to solving the mystery of Freeberg's disappearance, eventually producing a lengthy manuscript. After Muharto passed away in March 2000, the family attempted to find a publisher, but the economic situation, and Muharto's stipulation that the book first appear in English, the language in which it was written, had resulted in repeated rejections.

Eko handed me a ragged paper binder of photocopied pages. A series of housing relocations, a catastrophic computer failure, and other organizational missteps meant that Muharto's work survived only on this third-generation photocopy. The smudged characters on the cheap copy paper seemed only a few rainy seasons away from fading into illegibility. Also, I doubted that the contents were in any better condition than the medium. Retired military men of all cultures are prone to write sunset-years' memoirs of their exploits. Very few rise above turgid, detail-heavy catalogs of logistics, strategy, and mess-room politics. I casually leafed through the pages, then sat back and gave the tattered manuscript my undivided attention. In these words, the ripping yarns of dashing blockade runners had been complemented by an equally compelling detective story. Years of painstaking research in musty archives and heartbreakingly interviews with elderly witnesses had revealed Bob Freeberg to have been a pawn in the diplomatic intrigue, criminal malfeasance, and political betrayal that had accompanied the birth of Muharto's nation.

What I held in my hands was no less than the story of Indonesia itself. During his year as Freeberg's official (though uncertified) co-pilot, Muharto had visited all the Republican-held regions of the former Dutch colony, and had realized the enormity of the

task of building a viable nation from such a patchwork of cultures and traditions—and with political agendas ranging from hardline Stalinism to secular democracy to radical Islamism. Petit Muharto himself reflected the contradictory nature of his people’s struggle for self-determination. The beneficiary of a Dutch education in schools for selected children of the “native” elite, he had firmly believed that his new nation should be administered by fellow graduates—the best and brightest of the indigenous upper crust slipping into the polished shoes of the colonial civil service. But Muharto had also embodied the romanticism that fueled the struggle at ground level: the passionate fervor that drove village youths to attack Dutch positions armed only with pointed sticks; the right stuff that emboldened novice pilots to harass Dutch facilities by lobbing bombs from the cockpits of decrepit Japanese biplanes; and the stoic determination that helped millions of common people endure fearful privation to keep alive the dream of a free Indonesia.

Muharto had seen these noble ideals fade over the years as regional, social, and political self-interest threatened the integrity of his still-inchoate nation. He had been particularly incensed at how the narrative of the founding of the nation had been hijacked by the military officers who had assumed power as the civilian government imploded through corruption and incompetence in the 1960s. By exploiting the penchant for forgetting most of their history and mythologizing the rest, they had recast the struggle for independence as solely the work of village boys attacking Dutch positions with their pointed sticks, disregarding the essential role played by the Air Force in connecting the Republic’s far-flung outposts, and the contributions of foreign sympathizers like Bob Freeberg. By solving the mystery of Freeberg’s disappearance, definitively refuting Dutch accusations that he had betrayed the Republic, Muharto not only wished to clear his friend’s name and assure his place in Indonesian

history, he also hoped to remind a new generation of the values that drove the creation of their nation, values that were not exclusively Indonesian, but shared by all decent people in the world.

I could now understand the family's steadfast determination to publish the manuscript. Since I had been largely (if inadvertently) responsible for initiating the project, Eko proposed that I take over as co-author and do whatever was necessary to see the book through to publication. That would require an extensive rewrite, but not because of any lack of literary ability on Muharto's part. He had feared, quite reasonably, that his revisionist history, in which an American free-booting pilot is shown to have played an indispensable role in founding the nation, would have raised rabid howls of jingoist outrage. To ensure that his conclusions would be analyzed critically and dispassionately, Muharto presented results of his research with meticulous care, fully documented and cross-referenced, and expressed in English, a language Muharto had mastered in childhood.

This posed a serious dilemma. Working from an English source, I did not have the natural leeway afforded a translator. A cursory comparison of the book with Muharto's magazine articles (now readily available on the Internet) would indicate that I had made significant changes to the book. I could openly acknowledge my contribution, in effect reducing Muharto to little more than a researcher, but in doing so I would destroy the essential value of the book to Indonesians. For my depiction of this seminal period of national history would certainly be derided as the story of Indonesia being told, yet again, by some arrogant foreigner.

I met Petit Muharto when he was in his mid sixties, and saw that he embodied every ageist stereotype of a lively older man: he was sprightly, he twinkled. He had also been an engaging raconteur, so Eko and I had little difficulty recreating from our memories the scathing critiques and wry observations (and scandalous

adventures) he had so candidly expressed in private conversation but had omitted from the printed manuscript. With the addition of some historical background for the sake of readers unfamiliar with the period, and an epilogue (ably written by Eko) covering events from Muharto's death to the date of publication, we finally had a publishable book. I may be credited as co-author of **One Man Air Force**, but the story, and the voice that tells it, wholly belongs to Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo.



FOREWORD

BY PAMELA HYDE SMITH, U.S. AMBASSADOR (RET.)
OCTOBER 2011

When Petit Muharto Kartodirjo—ramrod straight, sharp as a tack and with a grandfatherly twinkle in his eye—sought assistance at the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta one day in the early 1990s, I was Press Attaché and the lucky recipient of his visit. His tale of his friend, the dashing American pilot Bob Freeberg, captured my imagination. Bob Freeberg sounded remarkable, an American hero who died of mysterious, possibly nefarious causes while making one of the daring flights that helped the new nation of Indonesia establish itself right after World War II. I also believed that Bob Freeberg's tale represented an early symbol of U.S.-Indonesian friendship and something about which both nations could be proud.

One Man Air Force presents the story of Bob Freeberg's extraordinary feats of courage, altruism and flying skill exactly as Petit Muharto told them to me in person. It is uncanny that Petit Muharto's voice seems to come out of the pages of this book. I have been pleased to see that a second, equally fascinating tale, that of Petit Muharto's touching and determined effort to find out what really happened to his friend, twines with the story of Freeberg's Indonesian adventures.

Such adventures they were: ferrying Soekarno, the head-of-state-to-be, in and out of Indonesian territory during the revolution against Dutch colonialism, “black flights” carrying contraband to arm the Indonesian rebels, possible double-dealing on all sides, a

crash in densely forested tropical mountains, the unexplained disappearance of a horde of gold, and fragmentary evidence that Freeberg was imprisoned and disappeared by the Dutch. Petit Muharto often accompanied Bob Freeberg on his missions, but fortunately did not copilot his fateful last flight. Persistent dead-ends during Petit Muharto's later research only made the story more compelling.

While in Jakarta, our U.S. Information Service (USIS) office in the U.S. Embassy was able to provide Petit Muharto with the leads that connected him with Freeberg's family in Kansas. When I returned to Washington in the mid-1990s, I spent many absorbing hours at the U.S. National Archives, tracking down the diplomatic dispatches and Congressional correspondence that shed some light on Freeberg's disappearance and the U.S. Government's efforts to determine what happened to him. Unfortunately, the historical records were inconclusive, but *One Man Air Force* reveals that they provided Petit Muharto with some of the clues that enabled him to make a very good guess about of Freeberg's fate while exonerating in his mind any doubts about Freeberg's honor.

I am happy to admit that Petit Muharto's own wisdom and integrity won me to his cause every bit as much as the thrill of sleuthing and the appeal of strengthening U.S.-Indonesian historical ties. We stayed in touch over the years, and now that he has passed away I still communicate with his family. It is an honor to have been asked by Petit Muharto's son to introduce *One Man Air Force* to an Indonesian, American and wider audience.

FOREWORD

BY DR.R.SUNARYO, AIR VICE MARSHALL, TNI (RET.)
1997. JAKARTA

The story you are about to read is unique in several ways. It is not fiction, not a novel nor a narration of made-up events. It is like a jigsaw of real occurrences of which the author is very keen to uncover the missing pieces and in so doing lift the veil of mystery surrounding his good friend's untimely exit from this world.

It is exactly that mystery that has haunted the author for the last forty years, obsessing him to find out the truth and bring about a fast and fair final disposal of the unfinished case. While reading the story you probably will also be intrigued by the strange lack of customary official handling of a case of such importance, rife with national interest of emotion, political as well as material and military in nature.

They began in 1947 when an intrepid American former Navy pilot agreed to fly blockade runs to and from Jogjakarta and other parts of the fledgling republic, braving odds and uncharted hazards at the urging of an equally intrepid freedom fighter: Petit Muharto, the author of this book. After flying many missions together, respectively captain and co-pilot of the eventually ill-fated Dakota that bore the proud designation RI-002, the two men, initially driven by different motives, became good friends. The American, Bob Freeberg, had at the outset undoubtedly his own personal motives to embark on this exotic adventure, but in the course of daring dangers and achieving results together the original diverging motivations gradually vanished, making way for one shared objective: success of the mission.

So when in October 1948 RI-002 was declared lost in South Sumatra while flying a mission for the Republic, Freeberg, who was captaining the plane (this time without Muharto as co-pilot) was mourned by his Indonesian friends as a great national loss. Consequently when due to a seeming lack of official concern on both Indonesian and Dutch sides as to what actually did happen to the plane, occupants, and precious gold cargo, speculations arose, some of which pointing suspecting fingers at to parties who were in power at the time of the presumed crash until the discovery of the wreckage thirty years later. This author became highly motivated to act and try to unravel the mystery.

The story as recounted in this book is the result of his exhaustive research diligently and stubbornly pursued over many years, delving into archives and libraries at home, in The Netherlands and the United States, contacting Freeberg's next-of-kin, former friends, and every possible source of information. Some retrieved new data shed more light on Freeberg's background but most items uncovered during the research ironically compounded the mystery, adding more missing pieces to the jigsaw.

Shortly after the presumed crash the Dutch Army launched a large-scale attack on Republican territories, and the following months were hectic with armed conflicts and diplomatic battles, culminating in the international recognition of the Republic. The ensuing euphoria and new national priorities might explain the less-than-appropriate attention to RI-002, but the official negligence in dispatching the remnants of the wreckage and crew (Freeberg's in particular) in 1978 is still in need of clarification. The story ends with an unvoiced invitation to the readers to make their own judgment and offer suggestions as to what further action may be taken to arrive at an acceptable conclusion, so that the dark blot on the history of Indonesia's struggle for independence will be adequately elucidated and fairly dealt with.





I

MYSTERY ON MOUNT PUNGGUR

JAKARTA

September 1989

One afternoon in April 1978, two subsistence farmers tramped along the rugged slopes of Mount Punggur on the Indonesian island of Sumatra in search of land suitable for the ancient practice of swidden rice cultivation. Once they had found a patch of land with a sufficient covering of topsoil and a convenient source of water, they would chop down any trees and set fires to burn the wood and other vegetation, creating a nutrient-rich ash which they would mix into the soil. After two or three crops had depleted the soil, the farmers would move on to other land and allow the native vegetation to regrow. After a few years they would return to repeat the cycle.

This system, which had served the peoples of Sumatra well for centuries, was now collapsing. Alip bin Dalahir and Tamirsan bin Muhar had walked more than one hundred kilometers from their home in the Lahat region into these remote highlands as they could no longer secure a sufficient livelihood from their ancestral land holdings. Three decades after Indonesians had forcefully wrested independence from their colonial masters in The Netherlands, farmers like Alip and Tamirsan still struggled to maintain a meager existence, compelled to make arduous, days-long expeditions into the Bukit Barisan in search of new land to clear and till.

On the third day of their current journey, after yet another difficult scramble up a jagged cliff face, they found their goal—as long as a source of water lay nearby. The two farmers descended into an adjacent ravine looking for a stream or indications of a spring. Halfway down the slope, Alip stumbled over a metal object, a rusted wheel rim. He and Tamirsan stopped and looked around. Similar fragments of rusted metal were strewn over the slope.

Being strangers to the area (and therefore naturally subject to suspicion), they did not contact local authorities, concerned that they would be somehow held responsible for what they had discovered. Instead, they hurried back to Lahat. Safe in their home territory, they reported their adventure to Rusli Asrul, the village head. A junior navy officer assigned to civilian administrative duty as part of the parallel military administration that extended throughout the archipelago, Rusli took immediate responsibility for investigating and reporting the discovery. The two farmers guided Rusli back to the site. A thorough search of the area turned up more metal fragments that Rusli recognized as parts of an aircraft. Rusli noted that a wing segment was marked with an insignia starting with the letters “RI”, indicating an aircraft registered in the Republic of Indonesia. The three collected whatever objects lying on the surface that they could easily carry, including fragments of human bones in an advanced state of decay, and returned to Lahat.

There, Rusli reported the discovery to his superior at the district naval station. The officer decided that the Air Force would be the appropriate branch of the service to investigate the discovery, so he contacted Major Victor Panggabean, the commander of the Talang Betutu Air Force base near Palembang, a five-hour drive east. Panggabean asked Rusli to bring Alip and Tamirsan, along with the objects they had recovered, to Talang Betutu.

Like many senior officers, Victor Panggabean had a keen interest in Indonesian military history. On inspecting the objects re-

covered from the site: a rusted electric dynamo, two hand guns, parts of a radio transmitter, Panggabean surmised that the farmers had found the wreckage of RI-002, an Indonesian Air Force C-47 transport that had disappeared while on a mission over southern Sumatra on 1 October 1948.

Panggabean was quite familiar with the story of RI-002, a war-surplus Dakota contracted by the Indonesian Air Force in 1947 to run the blockade imposed by the Dutch colonial military. The owner and pilot, Bob Freeberg was an American veteran navy pilot who, at the time, had gained legendary status for his exceptional skill, bravery and (equally important for Indonesians) his modesty and willingness to endure the same physical discomforts as the Indonesians during those years of struggle.

On the afternoon of 1 October 1948, RI-002 took off from Branti airstrip near the southern tip of Sumatra, carrying two hundred and fifty kilograms of gold bullion. The flight plan called for Bob to fly to Bengkulu on the west coast, and then on to the Republican stronghold of Bukittinggi. RI-002 never arrived in Bengkulu. The fate of RI-002 remained a mystery for three decades until the chance discovery of the wreckage on Mount Punggur, which lay near the usual flight path from Branti to Bengkulu.

Panggabean assembled a field investigation team whom the farmers and Rusli would lead back to the site. He instructed the team leader, Flight Lieutenant Sulaeman, to photograph the wreckage, recover as many human remains and other artifacts as possible, and to write up a full report on his findings. Panggabean knew that the disappearance of RI-002 had been one of the many unsolved mysteries of Indonesia's fight for independence. He had high hopes that after three decades, the true story of the last flight of RI-002 might finally be revealed.

A decade after these events, as I read Sulaeman's report, I was saddened to remember that the story the final flight of RI-002 remained a mystery. The investigation of the wreckage had not revealed why an aircraft in top condition with an extraordinarily skillful pilot at the controls had crashed into a remote mountain. There was no indication, either, of what had happened to the gold cargo.

I had an intensely personal interest in this obscure event in my nation's history, for I had been copilot of RI-002. For almost a year, until I was promoted to Major and reassigned to an administrative position at Air Force headquarters, I flew shoulder-to-shoulder (almost literally in the cramped Dakota cockpit) with Bob Freeberg as we dodged Dutch air patrols to connect Jogjakarta, the besieged capital of the Republic of Indonesia, with regional centers of resistance and with other independent nations.

During the course of my many careers, as an educator, soldier, diplomat, and businessman, I have met outstanding military commanders, powerful captains of industry, and distinguished statesmen. But none made quite the impression as did Bob Freeberg. Hardly a month has gone by that I have not reminisced about the adventures we shared as daring young men running the Dutch blockade in Bob's rattling, war-surplus freight plane; the first aircraft to proudly bear the RI designation, our declaration to the world of aviation that the Republic of Indonesia was a free, sovereign nation.

When I retired in 1989, I decided to make productive use of my now-abundant free time by investigating the mystery of RI-002. I was certain that, with perseverance and luck, I could write the final chapter of the story of Bob Freeberg, a tale that began one morning in July 1946 when I called on Air Commander Suryadi Suryadarma at his office on Maguwo air base in Jogjakarta to offer my services to the fledgling Air Force of the Republic of Indonesia.

2

BLOCKADE RUNNER

JOGJAKARTA — SINGAPORE

July 1946 — March 1947

“I don't know what rank I should award you. And, please, don't expect to be trained as a pilot. There are many other duties for which I don't have the right people yet.”

This was not the reply I had been expecting. For all of my life, even now, when air travel is as routine as taking a bus, I have looked skyward whenever I hear the distinctive drone of an aircraft in flight. In colonial times, the source of that stirring sound would have had Dutch markings. During the difficult years of the Japanese occupation, I would have seen the red sun of Japan on the fuselage. During the first months of peace, the airplane would have borne the insignia of RAF units repatriating European internees and allied prisoners of war.

But on a day in March 1946, I looked up to a sight for which I had been totally unprepared. At the time, I was in the propaganda section of the Indonesian Army, stationed in the central Java town of Salatiga. In accordance with my (inflated) rank of Lieutenant Colonel, I would travel to nearby Jogjakarta, the Republican capital, to liaise with senior officials in the civilian government.

As I stood on the expansive, neatly trimmed grass field in front of the presidential palace, I saw a biplane sporting the Republican

red-and-white flag. I learned later that it was a pilot-training craft left behind after the Japanese surrender and repatriation. Most of the airworthy planes then stationed in Indonesia had been flown back to Japan. Those that remained had been deemed unsuitable for military purposes, or simply too unsafe to fly.

The pilot was Augustinus Adisucipto, one of only three Indonesian nationals with formal aviation qualifications. He had selected the aircraft that he considered to be the least likely to fall from the sky, converted the rising sun logo into the red-and-white Republican flag, and named the craft the *Banteng*, Wild Bull. A much-reproduced painting depicts Adisucipto as the epitome of an early air ace: sporting a leather helmet, goggles, and wind-blown scarf as he flies a spindly aircraft “by the seat of his pants”.

I watched, enthralled, as the *Banteng* soared above the rooftops. My self-control vanished, and I wept. For I then realized that we were no longer a nation of coolies fit only to toil under the paternal guidance of the Dutch. If we had an airplane, that was the beginnings of an air force. And if we had an air force, to go with our army, then we had the means to defend our new nation. In my heart, I flew with that pilot as he made graceful turns above Jogjakarta and vowed that I would find a way to leave my desk job and serve my nation in the sky.

Four months later, I found an excuse to resign my army commission and apply to the Air Force, only to be offered yet another desk-bound position. Suryadarma wanted to take advantage of my experience in army propaganda by putting me in charge of the (one-man) office of “Air-Mindedness Propagation”. This would involve little more than public relations and recruitment. In addition, I would be demoted to captain, admittedly a rank more appropriate to my experience and responsibilities.

I hid my disappointment and discussed with Suryadarma how I might serve my nation by piloting a desk. The organiza-

tion he commanded had been in existence for only three months. Indeed, the very concept of military aviation was unfamiliar to most Indonesians, who seldom, if ever, had seen any type of aircraft. I knew that the Air Force, like our newly born nation, faced the herculean task of building a functioning organization with wholly inadequate human and physical resources in an environment ravaged by three years of enemy occupation. Suryadarma required an able, multilingual administrator far more than yet another would-be air ace.

I soon came to realize how essential my task might be. The former Netherlands East Indies consisted of many thousands of islands scattered across an area larger than Europe. Regions sympathetic to the Republican government were separated from the core territory of the Republic by populations who remained staunchly loyal to their erstwhile colonial masters. Aviation offered the best opportunity to connect these outlying areas with the central government and keep tabs on the Dutch.

At least this position enabled me to meet many people, young and old, who shared my interest in aviation. But the job offered no excitement. Nevertheless, I decided to bide my time and fulfill my duties with diligence, for I held the strong belief that once you are in the Air Force, sooner or later you will fly.

Subsequent events would dash these dreams of flight. In December 1946, the Dutch set up a tight air-and-sea cordon around Republican-administered areas of the archipelago, the opening salvo in their military efforts to lock down control of the entire East Indies. The ostensible purpose of the blockade was to curb the smuggling of firearms to the "rebels". Gun-running was only slightly affected. The semi-piratical traders of the archipelago had centuries of experience spiriting contraband under the noses of the Dutch and British. But the blockade did manage to choke off most legitimate commercial activity in Republican-controlled regions.

This was a hard blow. Three years of wartime restrictions on international trade had depleted the archipelago of every necessity of life not grown on our own soil or fashioned with our own hands. As trade resumed after the war, we scrambled to import such products as textiles to replace the garments worn to rags through three years of constant use. When the blockade choked off those imports, we were compelled, yet again, to fall back on our own resources. We made everything from postage stamps, army badges, and train tickets to clothing and building materials from whatever materials were at hand.

Critical materials such as medicine for our sick and injured, spare parts for our automobiles and public utilities, and radios to connect us with the outside world were beyond our capacity to manufacture, no matter how inventive we might be. To keep our republic fully functioning, we would have to somehow purchase these items abroad and sneak them past the vigilant Dutch. We would have to become blockade runners.

One victim of the Dutch blockade was my elder brother, Peded Muhardi Kartodirdjo, a captain in the Indonesian Navy. The blockade had paralyzed our sister force: Dutch ships were waiting to pounce whenever one of our handful of reconditioned Japanese patrol boats attempted to steam out of port. Mas Ded, as we called him, was now, like me, relegated to a desk job. In January 1947, one of his friends, an ethnic Chinese businessman named Tan who had clan connections throughout the region, suggested he resign his commission and come with him to Australia.

Our southern neighbor had proven to be a staunch supporter of our cause. The Australians were now running a blockade of their own—against the Dutch. The powerful dockworker's union, with the support of other labor organizations, were refusing to load Dutch ships berthed in Australian harbors in a bid to pre-

vent returning colonial forces from shipping military supplies to Indonesia. Tan believed that this opened significant opportunities for trade between Australia and the Republic.

Mas Ded could not accept the invitation as he had recently married and could not leave his wife. He suggested that I take his place. Tan agreed, and Suryadarma gave his blessings—with the condition that I bring back as many licenses in aviation as possible.

Tan and I made our way overland from Jogjakarta to the north coast port of Cirebon, where we boarded a boat for the trip across the Java Sea to Singapore. As expected, a Dutch patrol stopped us shortly after we had left Cirebon harbor. I had disguised myself as a lowly engine-room hand. I was taking a grave risk: the slightest detail might expose me as a member of the educated native elite. One of the armed boarding party might notice the lack of callouses on my hands, or a phrase of formal Dutch might escape my lips in my nervousness. Any of a dozen potential mistakes might end my journey while still within sight of the Java coastline.

The boarding party made a thorough search of the cargo hold, finding only sugar and coffee beans. They checked the identification papers of all passengers, including Tan. Ethnic Chinese residents of Java were assumed to be pro-Dutch, so the boarding party accepted his explanation that he was en-route to Singapore for legitimate trading purposes. The sailors barely glanced at me as I squatted on my haunches near the engine-room hatch, my eyes downcast in the attitude of submission that all inlanders assumed in Dutch presence. They let us continue, and after a few days we reached Singapore.

And there my journey ended. Tan and I discovered that we could not leave Singapore without Dutch papers. As a committed Republican, I had no intention of trying to secure a Dutch passport. Tan had no such compunctions and soon secured

Dutch-sponsored travel documents, enabling him to continue on to Australia. I was trapped in Singapore, my only option to smuggle myself back to Java. I was reluctant to return to Jogjakarta and resume my mundane duties as a desk-bound administrator, so I delayed my departure and hoped I could somehow serve our struggle from afar.

I soon made contact with Republican-friendly Indonesians in the British colony. Most were university students who had opted to join the struggle rather than continue their studies. Some were involved in the busy clandestine barter trade. Others concentrated on public relations or procurement of war materials. Well-dressed and urbane, they seemed to be the antithesis of the rag-tag militants in their homeland. But they did share our passionate conviction for Indonesian self-determination, and were willing to donate significant amounts of time, energy, and personal funds to the cause.

The tight Dutch naval blockade had stifled most communication between Singapore and Republican-held territories in Java and Sumatra. Largely ignorant of the situation on the ground, the Singapore-based partisans were desperate to open new channels of communication. Someone suggested we try to interest air-transport companies to fly to Jogjakarta. We thought this unfeasible, considering the non-existent status of our republic in the world of international aviation. But with few other options, we tried our luck and approached several private air charter companies. We were surprised and delighted to be met with universally positive responses.

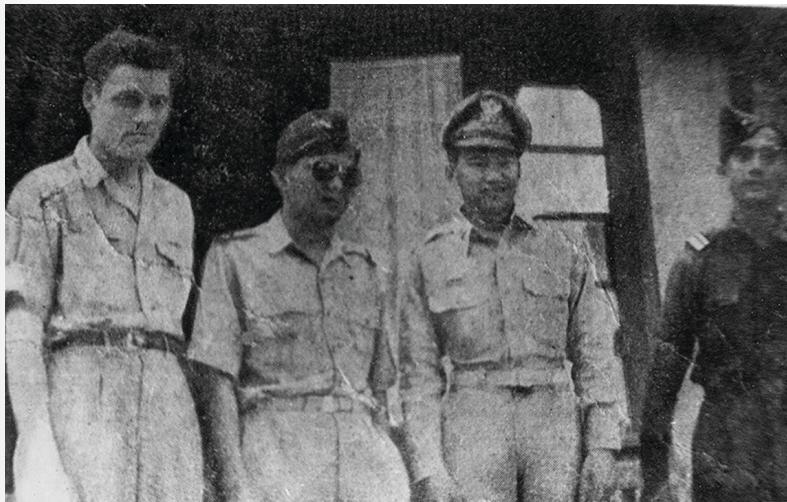
The first to express serious interest was CALI, the air charter company Bob had joined a few months earlier. They jumped at the chance to pioneer a new route in the booming East Asian aviation market.

As I was the only aviation man among the partisans in Singapore, my colleagues turned to me to help solve the consider-

able logistics and technical issues we faced. The most crucial was the availability of aviation fuel in Jogjakarta, as a Dakota could not carry sufficient fuel supplies for a round trip. The two 1200 horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1830 radial engines driving the C-47s used by CALI required 100-octane fuel, known as avigas and available at international airports over the globe. But Republican airfields could supply only 92-octane fuel. However, the many types of Republican aircraft had logged thousands of hours on this fuel since 1946 with no engine failures. When I explained the situation, the CALI captains elected to compromise. In Jogjakarta, they would transfer the remaining Singapore avigas to the auxiliary tanks for use during the critical takeoff and landing phases of the return flight, and fill the main tanks with our 92-octane fuel to use for cruising. With that and other technical concerns settled, we were ready to go.

The historic first international commercial flight into the Republic of Indonesia departed from Kalang airfield, at the time Singapore's civil airport, on 23 February 1947. The crew consisted of Captain Sam Terry, First Officer Vic Duzon, and even a flight attendant, an attractive Filipina I knew as Miss Brown. Terry was an American Air Force veteran while Duzon was a Philippines Air Force captain and a check pilot for his nation's civil-aviation authority.

Despite the exceptional competence of the crew and the cheering presence of the comely Miss Brown, I worried about the flight. Interception was not my primary concern: chances of encountering Dutch patrols were slight. Even if we were spotted, I was certain that a Dutch fighter pilot would not fire on a civilian aircraft bearing international registration. I was more worried about our own forces on the ground. There was no functioning two-way radio in Jogjakarta, and all telephone and telegraph communication passed through Dutch-controlled facilities in Batavia. With no method of announcing our intended arrival, ground forces might fire on us during our approach.



Sam Terry (left), captain of the first CALI blockade run to Jogjakarta, with Indonesian Air Force Captain R. Mantiri, CALI First Officer Captain Victor Dizon, and Indonesian Air Force Captain George Reuneker.

Fortunately, Captains Terry and Duzon devised a solution. As we approached Maguwo, we extended our landing gear at a higher altitude than usual and Duzon played with the propeller pitch controls to produce an alternating high and low drone from the engines, a maneuver that no enemy would have reason to perform. Their plan was successful. As we approached the runway, a green flag was raised on the pole beside the control shack, the signal that were were cleared to land.

I could see the runway was lined with a dense crowd of on-lookers, mostly in civilian dress. As soon as the Dakota had rolled to a stop on the parking apron it was engulfed in people. We had arrived during an air show: the latest in a series of events organized by the Air Force to raise morale.

The foreign crew were astonished, and delighted, to be considered the highlight of the show. The crowd erupted in a full-throated cheer when we opened the door and jumped down onto the tarmac. Suryadarma approached and formally welcomed the crew to the Republic of Indonesia. He then took me aside for a quick debriefing. As was customary among the military during the revolution, Suryadarma did not thank me for my role in organizing this groundbreaking flight, but the smiles on the faces of those around us was gratitude enough. For the crew, this was just another charter flight. But for the people of Indonesia, we were a harbinger of hope from the outside world, a long-awaited sign that the Dutch must certainly fail to quench the fire of revolution.

The historic CALI flights opened the eyes of many aviation companies in Southeast Asia and beyond. During subsequent weeks a number of aircraft landed in Jogjakarta, including a second CALI flight captained by Dan Cardwell. Many had been chartered by Indonesians residing abroad or by affluent foreigners who sympathized with the Republic.

Notable among these wealthy sympathizers was Bijayanandha 'Biju' Patnaik, an Indian businessman and close friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, future prime minister of India. His Dakota, bearing the call sign VT-CLA, made numerous flights to Jogjakarta carrying medicine, food, textiles and other goods in critically short supply in the isolated capital. Biju Patnaik himself several flights, providing an informal but important liaison between our leaders and their counterparts in India, then in the process of securing their own independence from the British.

The clearly humanitarian nature of these missions prompted the Dutch to permit over-flights to Republican territory—as long as the aircraft landed first at a Dutch-controlled airfield such as Batavia or Surabaya for cargo inspection. While Singapore air-traffic control dutifully informed all pilots of this requirement, few flights to Jogjakarta bothered to comply with the Dutch demand.

The humanitarian flights also prompted a number of companies and private individuals to seek formal aviation-services contracts with the new nation. All failed, for a simple reason. In 1947, the Republic of Indonesia was a nation under siege, with neither the financial resources nor political stability required to enter into mutually satisfactory contractual arrangements.

At this stage, a more unorthodox approach was needed to continue our blockade runs. An innovative solution invariably requires an exceptional person for implementation. In March 1947, I would meet such a person: Bob Freeberg.

Bob served as pilot on the third and final CALI flight from Singapore to Jogjakarta, which took place during the first week of March 1947. I met Bob at Kalang Airport shortly before the flight. He was a tall, full-bodied man, of similar age to me. I was struck by his sharp blue eyes, which can be intimidating to Asians accustomed to meeting only brown-eyed people. But those eyes were set in a cheerful, friendly face. When he spoke, his voice was au-

thoritative, but quiet and measured. To me, Bob evoked the heroic ideal of Javanese mythology: large and powerful, a formidable opponent, but gentle and well-mannered when not on the battlefield.

The outbound leg from Singapore, following the route taken by the two previous flights, was uneventful, except for a brief period of tension flying over the Java heartland. As we passed Mount Slamet and flew along the Serayu valley, our aircraft encountered a dense overcast. Bob descended until we dropped from the clouds. But now we were flying lower than many of the surrounding peaks, and the limited visibility increased the risk of a controlled flight into terrain.

As on the previous flights, I stood in the cockpit between the two seated pilots. Bob asked my advice. I studied the details of the ground flashing by a few hundred meters beneath us. I believed that we were a short distance north of Kutoarjo, which is on the main railway line connecting Jogjakarta with the rest of Java. Indeed, a few seconds later the rails came into view, clearly visible at this low altitude. I suggested Bob follow the rail line east. Fifteen minutes later we were flying over Jogjakarta, descending toward a safe landing at Maguwo air base.

Like the first two CALI flights, this was essentially a standard commercial charter; at least for the outbound leg. The return journey, however, was highly unorthodox. I asked Bob if we could make two diversions en route to Singapore. My first request was to fly to the small town of Karangendah in southern Sumatra. The Japanese had built an airstrip there, which we had now taken over. The base seemed to have been intended for fighters and other small aircraft: there were no records of an aircraft the size of a Dakota landing at Karangendah. Air Force command wanted Bob to survey the strip from the air and, preferably, attempt a landing.

The second request was to make a significant diversion to Bukittinggi, a town in the western highlands of central Sumatra.

The Japanese had built an airstrip at the nearby village of Gadut. But there would be no test landing here: the strip, neglected since the end of the war, was overgrown and pot-holed. Instead, we carried two Air Force engineers who would parachute into the village and recruit local residents to repair the strip, giving the Republic a vital administration and logistic base in Sumatra.

Though these high-risk tasks are more properly the duties of a military force, not a commercial airline, Bob readily agreed. We landed safely on the runway at Karangendah and could see no difficulty in taking off again; to our great relief, since the airstrip was, to use Bob's phrase, "smack in the middle of nowhere".

Also uneventful was the parachute drop into the highland valley near Bukittinggi. Fortunately, the CALI Dakotas were all war-surplus transports, lacking insulation and upholstery, but retaining military modifications such as a rear door that could be opened in flight to accommodate paratroopers. The drop was perfectly executed, thanks to Bob's wartime training and experience.

After landing in Singapore, I thanked Bob for his cooperation, praised his piloting skills and looked forward to flying with him on a future blockade run. Bob replied that he would soon be resigning from CALI, as he had bought his own aircraft and was now readying it for charter service. As we parted, I wished him the best on his new venture. I could not guess that we would soon meet again, and in a most surprising fashion.

3

THE SIXTH COFFIN

JOGJAKARTA

September 1989 – April 1990

Five flag-draped coffins are arranged with military precision on a parade ground of the Tanjung Karang Air Force base in southern Sumatra. They are awaiting transport to the nearby Taman Pahlawan Tanjung Karang, one of the many final resting places for national heroes: military personnel and civilians deemed to have made exceptional contributions to their nation. The four airmen and one civilian official honored on that day, 29 July 1978, certainly deserved this great honor, as they comprised the crew of the last flight of RI-002. That flight had carried a significant portion of the national treasury, a quarter ton of gold bullion, being transferred to relative safety in the highland town of Bukittinggi.

The remains had been retrieved from the crash site on Mount Punggur during the second expedition of the Air Force investigators. They had been able to set up camp and stay for several days, making an exhaustive survey of the area and unearthing components of the aircraft that had been buried by earth movements during the three decades since RI-002 had slammed into the mountainside. The team did not have the resources to transport the wreckage over the rugged terrain to

the nearest road, so they returned only with photographs, what parts of the wreckage they could carry, and the bone fragments now placed in the coffins.

I would later learn that a sixth coffin, larger than the others, had remained on the air base. The contents of that coffin were a mystery to all but a few of those attending the ceremony and remain so to this day. Like the other coffins, it may have contained a handful of weathered bone fragments, unidentifiable by the forensic technology of the 1970s. Or it may have been empty: a piece of theater diverting attention from a secret still buried on a remote mountainside.

I pondered this mystery while sitting in the gloomy archives of the Indonesian Air Force headquarters in Jakarta, trying to wrest long-forgotten secrets from the tons of paper stacked haphazardly on the shelves. I was spending what should have been my golden years in musty libraries, peering at grainy historical photographs and reading dry operational reports, because of a chance encounter with a journalist three years previously.

In June 1986, Indonesia hosted its first international air show. My good friend Sabam Siagian, at the time the managing editor of *The Jakarta Post*, had decided to mark the event with a special report on Indonesian aviation: past and future. He dispatched one of his foreign interns to interview me about my experiences running the Dutch blockade during our struggle for independence.

The intern, a young, somewhat unkempt Canadian fellow whose arrival at my house was heralded at some distance by the thunder of the vintage Harley Davidson motorcycle he used for transportation, seemed genuinely interested in the history of my nation's struggle for freedom. I spoke to him at length, telling him of the immeasurable services that Bob Freeberg had rendered my nation, when his aircraft had been an essential lifeline connecting the new Republic of Indonesia with the rest of the region. With

sub-standard fuel, little technical support, and no charts to speak of, Bob and I flew cargo and passengers between Republican air-fields and overseas destinations such as Singapore, Bangkok, and Manila; all while dodging Dutch fighters enforcing the blockade around the Indonesian archipelago.

At the time of the interview I had held my final position before retirement: negotiating public-works contracts for a heavy-machinery supplier. After the article was published, I carried a copy on my daily rounds to show to clients and colleagues. I was appalled to discover that few of my compatriots were aware of the essential role that Bob Freeberg had played in building our nation. If these well-educated corporate executives and government officials were ignorant of this important component of our national struggle, I could assume that the story of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 was unknown to the majority of Indonesians.

Three years later, as a retiree with long days to fill, I decided to commit to paper as much about RI-002 as I could remember. I began this endeavor with an article about Bob published in the 4 July 1989 issue of *The Jakarta Post* to mark the anniversary celebration of America's own struggle for freedom. In the article, I enumerated Bob's services to the Republic, and told of his easy camaraderie with our Indonesian crew and the respect and adoration he received (and which greatly embarrassed him) from all he met, whether national leader or hotel waiter. In closing, I mentioned the discovery of the RI-002 wreckage in 1978 and expressed my profound regret that there had been no formal investigation of the wreckage. Perhaps some clue as to the fate of this loyal friend and staunch supporter of the Republic remained waiting to be discovered on that remote mountainside.

To my delight, *Matra*, a general-interest magazine with a wide readership, requested permission to publish an Indonesian-language version of the article. In the issue following publication

there appeared a strongly-worded letter to the editor from Major R.A. Sulaeman (Retired), taking exception to my assertion that the aircraft wreckage in Sumatra had not been properly investigated. Sulaeman claimed that he had led a field investigation team and had submitted a full report of his findings. He also attached a testimonial that he had received from the Air Force commanding his investigative efforts.

At last, I thought, here was someone with first-hand knowledge of the RI-002 wreckage. I wrote twice to Sulaeman, in both letters apologizing for my ignorance and hoping that he would share any information or personal observations. I never received a reply, though Sulaeman was at the time a member of the South Sumatra provincial legislative assembly and, presumably, reachable by mail.

I was at a loss to understand why the person who had led the field investigation of the RI-002 crash (and was so proud to have received official commendation) seemed so unwilling to discuss the matter. At least, he should have displayed the common courtesy of replying to a letter of apology from a fellow retired Air Force officer.

Seeking answers to the questions raised by my one-sided correspondence with Sulaeman, I paid a visit to the Air Force archives in Jakarta. The staff seemed to be only vaguely aware of the content of the materials in their custody, and were happy to leave me alone in the stacks to fend for myself.

The first relevant document I encountered was the official flight manifest listing the crew and cargo of the last flight of RI-002. In addition to Bob, the crew consisted of two copilots: Flight Lieutenant Santoso and Flight Lieutenant Bambang Saptoadji, along with Flying Officer Soemadi and Sergeant Surjatman. Also on board had been Samaun Bakri, a senior civilian official.

Next, I found two decrees ordering the full-honors military burial to be conducted at Tanjung Karang Air Base on 29 July 1978, the anniversary of the first (and only) air raid against Dutch military facilities during our struggle for independence. However, there was no mention of whether Bob's remains were to be included in this heroes' burial.

After considerable digging, I managed to find the report of the field investigation team led by Sulaeman. The report stated that the team departed on 20 April 1978 and arrived late in the morning the following day. They could stay only a few hours, as impending bad weather forced a return to base. Sulaeman stated that the quantity of human remains was not sufficient to allow positive identification of the victims, but there was no doubt that they had found the wreckage of RI-002.

I could understand why the crash site had remained undiscovered for decades. Sulaeman described the terrain as savage: a steeply sloping rock face covered in thick vegetation and a few scraggly trees. The wreckage was arrayed over a two-hectare area with a vertical rise of two hundred meters. The team could not find the cockpit, only remnants of communications equipment.

They did find a tail wheel, and, a hundred meters away, an engine with one of the propellers stuck in the ground. One piece of wing still showed some portions of the RI-002 identification number, though the letters were badly deformed. Sulaeman was surprised to discover another wing section had a white star on a black circle with two horizontal white bands with a black edge on both sides of the star, similar to the insignia used by the United States Air Force. For me, this was the definitive proof that the wreckage was of RI-002. Bob had damaged a wing in May 1948 and replaced it two months later during an overhaul in Manila. He would have acquired the wing from a war-surplus aircraft being sold for parts. It is highly likely that the new coating of paint had been washed away over the years, revealing the original military insignia.

The most surprising discovery, however, was that the site had almost certainly been visited by a large team sometime during the preceding months. Sulaeman noticed spots where the vegetation had been cleared away and piled with fragments of the fuselage. Given the rapid growth rate of vegetation in this tropical environment, the previous visit must have taken place less than a year before, otherwise, all traces of land clearing would have been obscured by new growth.

Sulaeman made no attempt to analyze his findings. His report was duly endorsed by the base commander, Major Victor Panggabean, and forwarded to senior command in Jakarta, with a recommendation that a second expedition be dispatched for a more thorough investigation. Search as I might, I could find no trace of the second report, nor any indication that the Air Force had made any effort to determine the cause of the crash, or what had happened to the cargo.

Frustrated in my attempts to wrest information from the Air Force archives, I turned to civilian information resources. Fortunately, I began this stage of my investigations just when library research in Indonesia had become easier by an order of magnitude. Until the late 1980s, most of the books and academic papers relating to Indonesian history had been housed in three separate collections, zealously guarded by their respective institutions. Any serious research involved numerous applications for permission from officious bureaucrats, who would grudgingly allow limited access to specific material. In many cases, an exhausting search for a particular book or document resulted in the disheartening discovery that the desired volume was held in a rival collection, forcing the researcher to repeat the entire laborious process in another decaying building on the far side of town.

In 1989, these collections were consolidated into a seven-storey building adjacent to the downtown campus of the Univer-

sity of Indonesia. As I stepped through the portals of the imposing (and fully air-conditioned) structure, I mustered all of the logical problem-solving skills and academic rigor drilled into me by the Dutch-colonial educational system. My challenge was to ferret out clues concealed among the many millions of words contained in the tons of paper and microfilm above my head.

My first stops on this quest for the truth were the standard reference works on the independence struggle. I needed to reacquaint myself with the time and place, perhaps jogging my memory for long-forgotten facts and events that might suggest fruitful avenues of inquiry.

Many of these books featured news photographs from the years immediately after the end of the war in the Pacific, when we struggled to establish our nation. These were iconic images: banners proclaiming our freedom draped over buildings formerly owned by our Dutch overlords; nationalist leaders such as Sutan Sjahrir negotiating with colonial authorities as intellectual and social equals; militiamen, many still in their teens and armed only with bamboo poles with razor-sharp tips, ready to defend their new-found freedom with their lives.

One of these images is burned into every Indonesian heart. An imposing man in early middle age, impeccably dressed in a white tropical suit topped by a *peci*, a truncated cone derived from the Middle-Eastern fez, stands at a microphone set up on an open terrace. In the background is a group of onlookers, also neatly dressed in white tropical suits, the formal wear of the day. To his left and a few steps behind, a slight, bespectacled man stands with quiet dignity.

It was 10 AM. on the morning of Friday, 17 August 1945. The person at the microphone, Soekarno, reads a hastily composed message declaring the islands of the former Netherlands East Indies to be a sovereign nation. His companion is Muhammad Hatta, the co-signer of the document.

This announcement was neither delusional posturing nor meaningless political theater. When the Japanese invaded the Netherlands East Indies in early 1942, the colonial government fled into exile in Australia. During the three years of military occupation, the Japanese authorities had encouraged the continuation of the nationalist movement, to the point of establishing armed youth militias, in order to foster grassroots resistance to a future allied invasion.

That invasion did not happen. The allies captured one airbase in the far east of the archipelago, then turned northward to focus on Japan itself. When the Japanese surrendered, instead of continuing their administration of their formerly occupied territories, the defeated occupiers sailed home on their ships or retired into the countryside to await repatriation.

We were now on our own. Only a relative handful of military and civilian officials had escaped to Australia ahead of the invading Japanese. The government-in-exile did not have the resources to return and reinstate the colonial government. And the Netherlands itself, still recovering from the brutal Nazi occupation, was unable to send troops or functionaries halfway around the world.

Only the nationalist organizations had the capability to prevent the archipelago from descending into anarchy. During the previous weeks, the Japanese military authorities had sponsored several conferences in which nationalist leaders had discussed and agreed upon the philosophical and political foundations of an independent state of Indonesia. The day following the proclamation of independence, the nationalist congress elected Soekarno and Hatta as, respectively, president and vice-president of the new-born Republic of Indonesia.

They had struggled long and hard for this moment. Soekarno and Hatta had been educated in Dutch schools for the native elite,

with Hatta taking his university studies in the Netherlands itself. While in their twenties both had joined other Dutch-educated future-Indonesians in promoting nationalist ideas. They had risen rapidly to the leadership of the movement: Hatta for sheer intellectual brilliance, Soekarno for his charisma and oratorical talent.

Their growing prominence in the nationalist movement did not escape the notice of the colonial authorities. Soekarno and Hatta spent years in prison or banished to remote regions. They were both released by the Japanese, and were encouraged to re-assume their leadership of the nationalist movement. Under the Japanese occupation, they skillfully played their military overlords, collaborating when in the best interests of their fellow Indonesians while subtly undermining the Japanese to minimize the worst oppression.

While Hatta is immensely respected for his intellect and political skills, Indonesians revere and adore Soekarno. This magnificent orator convinced an entire nation, brow-beaten for centuries by European colonialists, that they could be the masters of their own homeland. For the next five years, the nascent nation struggled to keep the Dutch from reinstating their colonial empire. Dressed in rags, living on rice and soybean cake, and confronting tanks and machine guns with antique handguns or sharpened bamboo spears, the people of Indonesia, myself included, looked to Soekarno for hope and inspiration until that long-awaited day when the Netherlands would formally cede control of the islands of the East Indies to their former colonial subjects.

Reading those books evoked memories of those halcyon days as a youthful revolutionary. Inspired and invigorated, I perused the library with diligence for several weeks, cheerfully and ably assisted by the staff. But all the ability and dedication in the world will not find something that does not exist. I encountered only a few passing mentions of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 in the

official histories and memoirs of the period. Nor did I find much during my extensive search of the microfilmed newspaper archive. During the years of struggle, scores of publications, ranging from glorified pamphlets to full broadsheets, had been founded in both Dutch- and Republican-controlled regions. Some thrive to this day. I found many fascinating articles, but little information relevant to the mystery of RI-002. With limited resources, these feisty publications focused on their primary mission: to raise morale and mobilize resources in their respective communities by disseminating information relating to local concerns. This left little room for such matters as international blockade running.

I did find several mentions of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 in the Batavia Dutch-language press. As I expected, the opinions were uniformly negative, using defamatory language and rife with lurid speculation. Those articles sparked memories of conversations with other foreigners in Jogjakarta, who roundly condemned the libelous assertions of the colonial press. Some of this outrage made its way into print. Books written by foreigners who had observed or assisted us in our long struggle for freedom all portrayed Bob as the fearless, skilled, and noble aviator I so fondly remembered. One British author, a former diplomat who had coached our leaders in the arcane intricacies of international relations, praised Bob as “America's Best Ambassador”.

Good pilots, quite correctly, become nervous when their instrument readings conflict with their visual observations. Though long out of the cockpit, the paucity of hard information, cryptic indications of a deliberate cover-up, and wildly divergent opinions of witnesses, invoked in me the same visceral unease as when I suspected that an instrument on my control panel might not be indicating the true situation. The only way I could relieve this sense of unease would be to investigate, and perhaps solve, the mystery of Bob Freeberg and RI-002.

4

BIRTH OF RI-002

JOGJAKARTA — CIKALONG — TASIKMALAYA

May – June 1947

After the CALI flight with Bob, Suryadarma ordered me back to Jogjakarta and my desk. The Air Force was growing rapidly, with air bases being set up throughout Republican-held areas. Suryadarma was counting on me and a handful of other officers with advanced educations to handle administration of his increasingly unwieldy organization. For now, I could only stare at the stack of papers on my desk and dream of open skies.

In fact, this is how I had spent much of my childhood. In 1924, when I was five years of age, I saw an airplane for the first time. I was traveling home with my parents from Surabaya to the nearby town of Lamongan when we drove past the airfield at Gresik, some twenty kilometers to the north. Though the facility was seldom used, on that day a full squadron of military aircraft were parked on the airfield. We stopped near the fence and gawked at the flying machines.

I could not remember even seeing pictures of such odd-looking monsters before that day. I must have been staring at this amazing sight for some time, because I was pulled away by my father and ordered to return to the automobile so we could continue our trip home.

All afternoon and evening I kept wondering how those monsters could fly. The next morning I had my answer. A steadily increasing roar filling the sky sent us rushing from the house. We looked up to see the aircraft that had been parked at Gresik the previous day now flying in formation. It was a breathtaking spectacle. All eyes were glued on the planes until the entire formation disappeared behind the trees and the deafening roar faded away. From that day onward, I wanted nothing more than to fly.

The passing years only increased my passion for flight. On the rare occasions when I heard the drone of an approaching aircraft, I would rush out of my home, or even my classroom, for a look. By my late teens I had gained the physical and mental maturity required of a pilot. Had I been a European, my excellent eyesight, physical fitness, and academic achievement certainly would have won me entry into an aviation academy. But in the Netherlands East Indies, Indonesians could only stare in wonder at airplanes. The only Indonesian I knew who managed to enter the Dutch military flight academy was a champion tennis player who had coached the Governor-General's daughter. He had only a handful of compatriot classmates, including Augustinus Adisucipto, Abdurrahman Saleh, and Halim Perdanakusuma. Every other pilot would be trained from scratch after the war. But, as fervently as I wished, I would not be among them. Suryadarma remained deaf to my entreaties to be admitted into flight school. But if words would not convince him that I had the ability to become an aviator, actions might.

One morning I took a break from my desk to watch the evaluation of new recruits. Cadets were accepted for flight training only if they could demonstrate the basic skills necessary for controlling an aircraft. For this purpose we had fashioned a makeshift glider with rudimentary controls. We called this glider the Zogling, derived from the Dutch word for fledgling,

a name appropriate not only for the hopeful future air aces but the Air Force itself. The Zogling was towed across a grass field by a cable winched in by a powerful Harley-Davidson motorcycle engine. No one was injured attempting to fly the Zogling, but the flights were often a humorous display of nose dives, tail dragging, and even the glider being hauled ignominiously along the entire length of the field.

After the training session, I pulled rank on the flight instructor and commandeered the Zogling. Like a successful trainee, I demonstrated the ability to nose the craft up to the height of a man, keep the wings level while flying the length of the field, and to plop down squarely on the landing skid. I had hoped that this demonstration of basic skills would be enough to change Suryadarma's mind and authorize me for flight training. However, all I received was a reprimand, and the certainty that I would continue to pilot only my desk.

One beautiful morning in early June 1947, my desk-bound routine was broken when I received a message from the Republican Army Siliwangi Division base in Tasikmalaya, a town in the highlands of southwest Java, that a large aircraft had landed on a remote beach to their south. That was a remarkable enough occurrence, but I was astounded when told that the foreign occupant had asked for me by name.

I reported this news to Suryadarma, who agreed that this was worth an official investigation. Suryadarma ordered me to fly to Tasikmalaya and liaise with Army command there. Considering the urgency of the mission, Suryadarma instructed me to take the fastest aircraft in our motley fleet, a Nishikoren monoplane, for the journey.

I would also have one our best pilots. Soenario, or Betet, as we called him, was one of the remarkable success stories of our fledgling air force. A year earlier, he had been a village boy

who had barely seen an airplane. Now, after only rudimentary instruction on decrepit Japanese wrecks, he was at the controls of a nimble, powerful military aircraft. But I had every confidence in Betet, which was good, as only he was wearing a parachute.

In Tasikmalaya I reported to the base commander, who assigned Lieutenant Pang Soeparto as my liaison counterpart. The foreigner had since returned to his aircraft, so Pang and I hopped into a jeep for the drive to the beach. We arrived shortly before dusk to see a Dakota, still in camouflage colors and with no markings at all, parked on the sand halfway between the water and a line of palm trees. It was not a bit damaged, indicating that this emergency landing on a narrow strip of sandy beach had been a masterpiece.

During the journey, I had assumed that this had been an unannounced blockade run gone wrong, and wondered who might be the pilot. As the former contact person for the CALI blockade runs, many pilots would know my name and would consider me as the obvious person to ask for assistance in an emergency such as this. However, I knew that landing on an unprepared beach in fading light would require piloting skills of a high order, and that being in such a situation in the first place indicated an adventurous pilot. Therefore, as we drove up to the Dakota I was not the least surprised to see Bob Freeberg, unshaven, unwashed, with the bright expression of cheerful optimism that I would remember, fondly, long after Bob himself was gone.

It was Bob's typical good fortune that the sand at the time of landing, shortly after nightfall, had been moist and compact. But now, after two days of hot sun, the sand was dry and loose and the wheels had sunk twenty centimeters.

"Two days ago I kept rolling and rolling when I landed," Bob said. "But now the plane doesn't budge an inch, even when I apply full power."

Bob introduced me to the two flight mechanics, whose love of adventure had overcome their quite-justified annoyance at being, basically, shanghaied. They were enjoying this mystery trip to an unknown destination, proudly explaining that the beach landing had been beautifully done and they were happy to be alive.

“The skipper is a good pilot,” one of them volunteered.

While Bob busied himself with his Dakota, the mechanics told me how they had come to be on this remote beach. Three days previously in Manila, Bob had offered them a token fee for what he had claimed to be a test flight. If the mechanics wondered why this test flight took off before dawn, they did not ask questions. But they were certainly surprised when the aircraft, once airborne, headed directly south toward Borneo, landing four hours later at Labuan to refuel. They knew they had been fooled, but their love of adventure won out, and they put their trust in this young American pilot.

They would soon discover how much adventure this flight had in store. Bob was navigating from a chart with a scale of one to ten million. The entire island of Java, stretching over a thousand kilometers from Sumatra to Bali, was only a ten-centimeter-long smudge on his map. Five hours out of Labuan, Bob spotted an island that he identified as Bawean, which on his chart is represented by a small dot in the Java Sea to the east of Madura. I believe that, in fact, he had flown over an island in the Karimun group some three hundred kilometers to the west. Bob continued southward, following what the chart indicated would be the correct bearing from Bawean to Jogjakarta – until he reached the south coast of Java, with a large town nowhere in sight.

Thinking he was still far to the east of his actual position, Bob headed westward, searching for familiar landmarks until he spotted a railway line. He explained to the mechanics that on his previous flight to Java he had navigated by following this rail-

way line. Thinking that he was much further east than he was, he had every reason to believe that following this line west would take him directly to Jogjakarta.

Bob was therefore dumbfounded and not a little concerned when it terminated in Purworejo. He flew north to south over mountainous territory until the light of the gibbous moon illuminated the terrain. By nine p.m., his fuel was almost finished. Bob suggested that he might ditch the aircraft and swim to shore with the help of life vests stored in the cabin. But the stricken look on the faces of his companions suggested that this would not be a viable option.

At last, Bob spotted a stretch of beach gleaming in the moonlight. With only a few liters of fuel left in the tanks, he set the Dakota down without a scratch.

The beach seemed deserted. Bob and the mechanics performed their post-flight checklist and prepared to sleep on the hard benches in the cabin. After several minutes, Bob saw flickers of orange light through the cabin windows. He rose and cracked open the rear cargo door. Indistinct figures, some holding flickering bamboo torches, were visible among the palms lining the beach about fifty meters from the Dakota.

Several of the figures approached, stopping twenty meters from the aircraft. One of them, a robust middle-aged man who they later learned was the village headman, spoke a few words in an unfamiliar language. Bob turned to the mechanics in hopes of a translation. They only shrugged. Bob spoke in English, and one of mechanics repeated the phrase in Tagalog. Bob and the headman regarded each other in mutual incomprehension for a few moments. The villagers spoke a few words to each other, then turned and walked back toward the line of palms. Bob shrugged, and closed the rear door.

Two hours later, the chattering of voices and the flickers of torchlight through the windows awakened the crew.

Bob again opened the door to see the headman and his companions now standing only a few meters from the door. The headman handed his torch to a companion and made the universal signs of hospitality: bringing his bunched fingers to his mouth to indicate eating; tilting his head and laying his cheek on an open palm for sleep.

Bob turned to the mechanics, who knew better than to refuse an offer of hospitality when alone and defenseless in foreign territory. They gathered their gear, hopped onto the sand and slid the door closed. Bob motioned that no one was to touch the Dakota, and the headman nodded. They followed the villagers to the tidy cluster of raised wood-and-bamboo houses they called Cikalang. There, the crew were given a sparse but satisfying meal of rice and grilled fish, then invited to sleep on straw mats laid on the wooden floor of the headman's house.

The following morning Bob and his crew rose at dawn to make a visual inspection of the Dakota. The aircraft had no visible damage. Bob fired up the engines and attempted to roll the aircraft along the sand. The heavy Dakota would not budge, the wheels trapped in the soft sand.

A few villagers squatted at the treeline, enthralled that the aircraft had roared mightily, visibly straining, but could not free itself from the sand. The headman indicated that Bob should return with him to the village.

At the village, Bob was met by a squad of armed soldiers, one of whom spoke halting English. He informed Bob that he would need permission from the army command in the region to take off again. The soldier also noted that some of villagers thought he and his crew were Dutch spies and wanted to shoot them.

In late afternoon, Bob climbed into the army truck and embarked on a harrowing 60-kilometer ride over the coastal limestone

hills to the army base at Tasikmalaya. The six-hour trip over the narrow road with bad hairpin turns and sheer drops on either side kept Bob anxious the whole way. He finally arrived after midnight.

In Tasikmalaya Bob was able to explain his situation more fully, including giving the officers the name of his one contact in the Republic: Captain Petit Muharto.

Pang and I now had to decide what to do about the Dakota. Though this village was staunchly Republican, many residents of this region remained sympathetic to the Dutch. Chances grew with each passing hour that the news of Bob's landing would reach Dutch-controlled Batavia and prompt the dispatch of an air patrol. Time was not on our side.

Bob had not yet grasped the seriousness of the situation. He suggested we contact a Singaporean firm to ship perforated steel plates by landing craft to the beach. I had to remind him that the Dutch naval blockade would make this impossible.

More than a hundred villagers were standing around the plane, some of them running their hands along the fuselage, unable to believe that such a colossus could fly. By this point almost every Indonesian, even those living in remote areas, had seen an airplane in the sky; but few had seen an aircraft up close. In this hard-scrabble seaside village, the landing of Bob's Dakota was a welcome diversion. Life was hard even in the best of times in this remote corner of Java. The villagers eked out a living through fishing, rice cultivation on the narrow strip between the coast and the Parahyangan range, and for the "lucky" few, penurious wages working on nearby rubber plantations.

So, as usual in those times when even the most basic necessities were often unavailable, we improvised a solution using whatever was on hand. We first attempted to make a runway of woven coconut leaves. This failed as the strips could not take

the weight of the Dakota. By this time, hundreds more villagers, some from tens of kilometers away, had descended on the village. This crowd gave me an idea.

As is typical in Java, the houses in this village were constructed of woven bamboo matting attached to wooden support poles and beams. Bamboo is strong as well as pliable: a mat could easily support the heavy Dakota. Pang called together the heads of each nearby village. Using both our authority as military officers and appeals to the villagers desire for independence from their despised Dutch overlords, we convinced the leaders to mobilize the residents of their respective villages to weave a total of five hundred bamboo mats, in size and shape similar to the walls of their houses.

The villagers would need three days to complete the 500 mats. Since it was Bob's intention to seek charter contracts with the Republicans, I decided we could best use this time to make such arrangements. Bob and I returned with Pang to his army base in Tasikmalaya. From there we boarded the Nishikoren for the thirty minute flight back to Jogjakarta to meet with Suryadarma.

The briefing with Suryadarma took less than thirty minutes. The Air Force commander explained that the Republic had a stock of quinine stored in Tasikmalaya. The anti-malaria drug would fetch a high price on the international market, but the Dutch had forbidden direct commercial transactions with the Republic. Suryadarma wanted Bob to sneak the quinine out from under the noses of the Dutch and fly it to Manila to be sold, along with some high-value vanilla beans stored in Jogjakarta. Bob agreed without hesitation, and we returned to Tasikmalaya with the Nishikoren.

We again wedged ourselves into the open rear cockpit, Bob plumping his large frame onto the deck of the aircraft lying flush on the bulkhead, me squatting between his feet, face-to-face. To take my mind off the discomfort during this thirty-minute flight, I studied the features of this remarkable foreigner, a cheerful, open

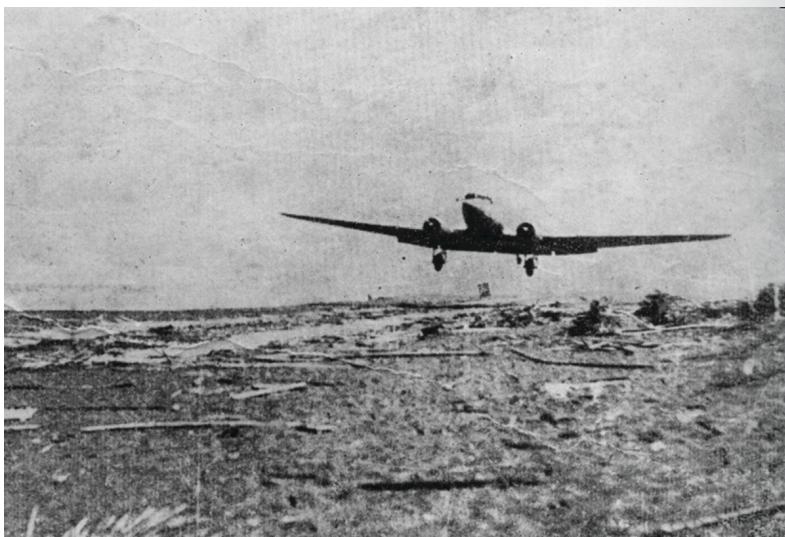
face highlighted by sky-blue eyes. The eyes, somehow, were both piercing and kind, the eyes of a strict but fair military man who would forgive you any mistake—if you made it only once.

Bob did not speak during the entire flight, as any conversation could scarcely be heard over the roar of the powerful engine and the wind whipping past our ears. But I regarded Bob's reticence as fitting for a person of such extraordinary skill and confidence. Here was a man who had flown his aircraft single-handed on a fifteen-hour flight to a destination in a foreign country he had visited only once before, by a very different route, all the while guided by a chart that showed critical navigational landmarks as mere specks in the ocean. Nevertheless, he could land on an unprepared beach and take off again from an improvised runway, all without much fuss. At the time, I wondered whether he was extraordinarily skilled, incredibly lucky, or just an incurable optimist. In the following months, I would come to realize that he was all three, and more besides.

Crammed into the open cockpit of what was currently the most advanced aircraft in our armada, I saw clearly how the Dakota, and Freeberg himself, could serve our revolution. Here was an opportunity to do things off the beaten track—new ways to outsmart the enemy. I was certain that the arrival of this brave young pilot, literally dropping from the skies, might be a turning point in our revolution.

The next morning, we again made the nerve-wracking drive across the stark limestone hills to the beach at Cikalang, this time carrying two drums of aviation fuel. We now had to wait two more days, each moment dreading that we might hear the faint drone of a Dutch patrol aircraft approaching the beach. To pass the time, I visited the houses where the mats were being hand-woven.

The four-square-meter mats, fashioned from five-centimeter-wide bamboo strips, represented prodigious (and wholly volun-



RI-002 takes off from
the beach at Cilotok in
Southwest Java.

tary) effort by these impoverished villagers. Many would work at night, then depart for another back-breaking day in the rice fields or in fishing boats. I hoped they had not lost sleep for no reason.

On the morning of 8 June 1947, the 500 mats were finished. I ordered them laid in two 450-meter parallel strips the width of the landing gear. As the mats were being put in position, Bob and I had the first of many disagreements which would mark the time of our professional collaboration. I felt the mats should overlap in the direction of travel, while Bob insisted on the opposite. I forget which of us prevailed on that occasion, but I do remember a spirited argument.

The Dakota would take off with thirty minutes total fuel, the 92-octane fuel I brought from Tasikmalaya mixed with the traces of 100-octane fuel remaining in the tanks. We scraped the sand from around the main landing wheels. Bob revved the engines to full power. Pang, myself, and scores of villagers strained at the tires until, with a lurch, the Dakota rolled onto the first mat of our improvised runway. Pang and I then thanked the villagers for their assistance and joined Bob and the two mechanics on board.

“Now, watch the air speed,” Bob told one of the mechanics, who was sitting in the right-hand seat. “As soon as we reach sixty, get the flaps down full, okay?”

Off we went. I felt a sudden heave as the flaps went down and we were airborne. We made a wide, shallow, climbing turn over the Indian Ocean, then passed over the landing site to see that the matting was scattered all over the sand by the propeller backwash. With Pang navigating, we headed inland, landing in Tasikmalaya thirty minutes later with no fuel to spare.

In Tasikmalaya, the mechanics refueled the aircraft while soldiers loaded our primary cargo of quinine sulfate, well over a metric ton. From there, we flew to Jogjakarta to load a metric ton of vanilla, the most expensive spice in the world after saffron.

We met with Suryadarma the following morning, and he instructed me to accompany the flight to Manila as mission leader. Pang would accompany us to represent the Republican Army's Siliwangi Division, the owner of the cargo. Suryadarma also assigned a young airman, Sub-Lieutenant Boediardjo, as the radio operator. Boediardjo was, like me, a beneficiary of the Dutch program to educate the native elite. He spoke Dutch and English and had been trained in radio maintenance and other useful technical skills.

There was one more important issue to consider. The quinine cargo was potentially a matter for dispute. The raw material had been harvested from a Dutch-owned plantation and processed in a Dutch factory shortly before the war. The Republic of Indonesia took the position that the Dutch had abandoned all claim to the property when the government fled to Australia during the Japanese invasion. As the current sovereign government, the Republic therefore claimed the quinine as its own.

On the other hand, Bob's unregistered, war-surplus Dakota was effectively illegal in the world of international aviation, like an automobile without license plates. Such an aircraft flying from an unknown nation carrying a disputed cargo and undocumented passengers would certainly encounter difficulties with customs and immigration officials.

Suryadarma insisted that the Dakota carry some sort of identification as belonging to the Republic of Indonesia. Under international aviation regulations, the Republic was included in the air territory of the Netherlands East Indies. Aircraft domiciled in the territory were issued a registration consisting of PK (one of the prefixes assigned to the Netherlands by international aviation agreements) followed by three digits. Since simply making up a PK registration number would also be illegal (like an automobile owner fashioning his own license plates) we decided to create our own registration system and hope for the best.

I suggested that the designation bear the initials RI, for Republic of Indonesia, followed by three digits. Suryadarma gave his approval, and I proposed the call sign RI-002. At first Bob did not agree, claiming RI-001 for his plane, since his was the first civilian aircraft of the Republic. But he conceded the point when told that RI-001 was reserved for the future presidential airplane. So, on 9 June 1947, this war-battered Dakota was christened RI-002.

The RI-002 marking was painted on the tail while we spent the rest of the day resting and preparing for the journey. Two hours after midnight on 10 June 1947 we set off for Manila. When we landed at Labuan six hours later to refuel, no one commented on the RI-002 markings. As in centuries past, this strategic port on an island off the northwest coast of Borneo, astride the busy mercantile routes of the South China Sea, was indifferent to nations and politics, caring only that the ships that docked (and now the aircraft that landed) had money to spend or goods to trade. An hour later, with full tanks and great anticipation, we began the final segment of our journey.

During the uneventful final leg to Manila, Boedi, Pang, and I discussed our situation and tried to plan our next move. We had no idea of the kind of welcome we could expect in the Philippines, considering that my compatriots and I carried only minimal personal documentation (the Republic of Indonesia had yet to issue its first passport) and our aircraft was identified only by a made-up registration number from an unrecognized nation. Boedi, try as he might, could not get the radio working so we could not even announce our imminent arrival. Discouraged, we all looked to the cockpit, where Bob, calm and composed, showing no sign of fatigue, was on his ninth hour at the controls. We turned to look at each other, our faces seeming to say: Lets just do it, come what may!

As we approached Manila, Bob asked me to sit in the copilot seat to operate the flaps. Neither of the two mechanics were qual-

ified as copilots, so they could not take the seat for fear of sanctions should aviation authorities discover that they had operated controls while in Philippine air space. I had joined the Indonesian Air Force to fly, and now I finally found myself sitting in front of the controls of an aircraft in flight.

I was quite nervous. As we could not inform air-traffic control of our presence, Bob put the flaps into the one-quarter position and made a pass over the airport: a clear indication that we intended to land. The green flag went up. As we turned for the downwind leg, Bob asked me to set half flaps. I knew how to do it, but maybe because I was nervous I overshot the neutral position. The plane sank frighteningly (or so it seemed to me). Without a word Bob added power and put the flaps in the half position. He only smiled and said, calmly: "Be careful not to pass the neutral position."

I apologized, and did not repeat my mistake when ordered to put three-quarter and then full flaps on the final approach. After landing, we were asked to report immediately to Department of Civil Aviation officials. I had assumed they would ask about the unfamiliar registration, and so had prepared a speech asserting the legitimacy of the Republic of Indonesia and what we considered to be our legal right to administer our own airspace.

Instead, however, an official asked Bob to identify his copilot. This was evidently a requirement for a Dakota on an international flight. Bob looked around helplessly until I stepped forward and said: "I am the copilot!" After all, I had been sitting in the right-hand seat when we landed.

"Please show me your license," the official said.

I hesitated and then took out my Air Force identification card. In Indonesian, it read: Muharto: Opsir Udara III. During this period, the English translation of my rank would have been Flight Lieutenant. This rank does not necessarily indicate that I could actually fly an airplane. On the reasonable assumption that

none of the Filipinos were familiar with Indonesian military rank designations, I gave myself a demotion of one grade and stated my rank as Pilot Officer. That satisfied them, and from then on, at least in Filipino eyes, I was officially a pilot. Nevertheless, thanks to the Dutch, it would be months before I would fly again.

5

INSTITUTIONAL AMNESIA

JAKARTA

February – October 1991

During my various careers I have attempted to instill a respect for the written word in my students, subordinates, and colleagues. Nevertheless, I am forced to recognize that most of my efforts have been in vain. Indonesia has an oral culture; we see little value in keeping authoritative written records, save for land registries and other practical matters. If we wish to learn about an event in recent history, we will simply ask someone who was there.

Only a decade had passed since the discovery of the RI-002 wreckage: I was certain that the officers commanding the various military units involved in the investigation should still have clear memories of this important and relatively recent event. My first call was to Air Marshall Ashadi Tjahjadi, who had been chief of staff of the Air Force when the crash site was discovered. I knew Ashadi personally, so he took my call and seemed quite forthcoming. Nevertheless, he had little information to offer.

Ashadi explained that that he had too often been away from Air Force headquarters, escorting General M. Jusuf, then joint military chief of staff, on inspection tours. I knew this to be a reasonable excuse. Jusuf had been a dedicated commander who

kept close watch on activities at all levels of the military services. He expected relevant staff officers to be at his side during field inspections, not commanding a desk in Jakarta.

Ashadi had instructed his aide, Colonel A.R. Alamsyah, to handle all the details of the investigation. But Alamsyah's demise a few years before had blocked this important avenue of investigation. Still, it is strange that Ashadi himself could not remember what had happened to Bob's remains, since he, in fact, had signed the order for the military funeral.

Nor could Victor Panggabean. Though he had dispatched the investigative expedition led by Sulaeman, Panggabean claimed that he could not remember what was done with the remains. When I contacted him by telephone, he told me: "It was so long ago and I cannot remember anything about it now."

As for Sulaeman, who might have provided much valuable information, I never heard a word, despite two attempts at communication. This mute stance of Sulaeman and Panggabean's failing memory seemed strange, even suspect. I have no idea whether there had been some sort of understanding between Ashadi, Panggabean, and Sulaeman to consign RI-002 to the dustbin of history. Or whether it was just a case of former military officers averse to risking their comfortable retirement or prestige by revisiting a past mystery, unearthing metaphorical skeletons that had been laid to eternal rest along with the remains of the RI-002 crew.

I then attempted to track down military commanders who had served in South Sumatra at the time of the crash. During the revolution even senior officers had been astonishingly young. Four decades later there should be at least one freedom fighter with clear memories of that time.

I was correct. In 1991 I met H. Nurdin Pandji, who had been a Major in the Republican army. In late 1948 he had been commander of the Lampung Northern Front, and commander of the

Mobile Battalion of the North Lampung Sub-territory, headquartered in Kotabumi. He remembered most details of this eventful period and strongly denied knowledge of an airplane crash in his territory. As the highest authority in the region, Nurdin assured me, he would have been informed of any such incident.

Referring to the disturbed earth near the wreckage, I asked if a Dutch patrol could have found RI-002 as they advanced into Republican territories after the second Dutch aggression in December 1948. Nurdin explained that the Dutch military forces started their advance to Kotabumi from Tanjung Karang in the south on 1 January 1949 and occupied Kotabumi on 24 May 1949. He had by then already moved his headquarters to Kasui, west of Kotabumi, the area he held and defended against enemy penetrations until the end of hostilities.

On the date that the cease-fire became effective in August 1949, he met his Dutch counterpart, Captain Klapper, who confirmed that the Dutch troops were dispatched from Tanjung Karang and did not come from the north, so they did not pass through the Mount Punggur area. Nurdin also asserted that no skirmishes between Republican and Dutch troops ever occurred in the area under his command. Thanks to Nurdin's clear recollections, I could be certain that the RI-002 wreckage had not been found by the Dutch. Whoever had disturbed the wreckage had done so many years (most likely decades) after the event.

Having learned little of value from sources in the military, I then turned my attention to the surviving relatives of RI-002 crew members, in the hope that they might have information not recorded in the official records.

I first found Fuad Bakri, the son of Samaun Bakri, the Republican senior official who was responsible for the gold cargo. Fuad had been present at the military burial of his father and the other Indonesian victims in July 1978. The night before the ceremony,

Sulaeman, in his capacity as investigation-team leader, briefed the families. He instructed them not to be concerned about the gold bullion, as “it would distract from the solemnity of the occasion”.

Fuad had been offended by this junior officer's patronizing attitude toward the families of national heroes. He chastised Sulaeman, asserting that the families were not interested in the gold, but only wanted to know all of the truth so they could put the matter to rest after thirty years.

Fuad showed me a clipping from Bandung newspaper *Pikiran Rakyat* dated 7 August 1978, reporting on the burial ceremony and containing a summary of Sulaeman's briefing. Two points caught my attention. Sulaeman noted that “among the human remains found was a long tooth which seemed to belong to the American captain”. It is unlikely that Sulaeman's audience took that seriously. Nobody would ever believe that the teeth of a Westerner are longer than those of Asians. Sulaeman was neither an anatomist nor a dentist. He might have been joking or he perhaps thought his audience was gullible enough to believe this.

Sulaeman also referred to a 7.62 mm caliber bullet lodged in a generator, one of the pieces of wreckage lying on the surface and brought back by the two farmers who first discovered the crash site. Sulaeman suggested this as proof that RI-002 had been fired upon in the air, though as an intelligence officer he should have known that the anti-aircraft guns from the period all used bullets of at least 12 mm caliber.

In admonishing the families to ignore rumors that the RI-002 had carried a quantity of gold bullion, Sulaeman explained that the Air Force had already formed a special team to investigate. This also seemed to be an item of disinformation. My thorough search of Air Force archives had found no trace of a report on the second visit to the site. I know that this second investigation had lasted for several days, as there had been sufficient time

to dig up the buried cockpit. As a former Air Force administrative officer, accustomed to the meticulous documentation of any and all official activities, I found this absence of written evidence puzzling, and wondered if this was evidence of lax documentation, or something more sinister.

The newspaper articles Fuad Bakri showed me suggested a new avenue of inquiry. There is no doubt that RI-002 had been carrying the reported quantity of gold bullion when it lifted off from Branti air strip en route to Bengkulu. The definitive proof of this assertion was an item in the authoritative national daily *Kompas*, reporting that a band of wild rattan harvesters had stumbled upon the wreckage in May 1983. As an illustration of how the story of RI-002 repeatedly vanishes from the public consciousness, the newspaper claimed that the wreckage was "not previously known". Only after three days did the newspaper issue a correction and identify the wreckage as the remains of RI-002. Unlike the brief mentions of the wreckage discovery and full-honors burial of the crew in 1978, the 1983 rediscovery was widely reported and generated considerable public reaction.

Several readers contributed additional information through letters to the editor. One correspondent, Slamet Adi Hadmodjo, identified himself as supervisor for Dutch gold mines in western Java that had been taken over by the Republic. He remembered that in July 1947 there had been ten twenty-five kilogram cases of gold stored in his office in Sukabumi waiting to be transported by truck to Jogjakarta. The first Dutch aggression at the end of that month had sealed off all land routes into the Republican capital, necessitating a "Plan B". Slamet was instructed to transport the gold to the town of Serang in Banten, a Republican region located at the northwest corner of Java.

An article from a 1983 issue of the Jakarta magazine *Sari-nah* picks up the story. Army Captain Abdurrahman, who in

1948 had worked for the Air Force in Serang as a civilian truck driver, vividly recounted personal memories of the night he helped load cargo onto RI-002:

“After the briefing that night, five cases were transported from the residency office to Air Force headquarters. Each case had to be carried by two men. By midnight, the cases were moved again to the RI-002 Dakota. I also helped carry them, and the cases were transported by a 1937 Chevrolet truck. I was the driver. One case was already opened and by God, as long as I have lived, I have never seen so much gold.”

The disappearance of the gold had been the subject of numerous conversations in Air Force canteens during the weeks following the disappearance. Our theories coalesced around three possible scenarios.

The first scenario was inspired by a brief report in ANETA, the Netherlands East Indies news service. The report, which was retracted the following day, stated that RI-002 had been intercepted by “six Dutch fighters” and forced to land in Palembang, a town in a Dutch-controlled region of Sumatra. The single source of this item, I discovered, had been an unconfirmed report received by the Republic of Indonesia representative office in Singapore. A news item some days later mentioned that the American consulate in Batavia had dispatched an officer to Palembang, who had found no witnesses or other evidence to confirm the story. The colonial government used the American report to buttress their claim that they had no knowledge of, or involvement in, the disappearance of RI-002.

This lack of physical evidence, along with the discovery of the wreckage on Mount Punggur three decades later, allowed me to dismiss this scenario completely. As a former military officer familiar with Dutch administration procedures, I knew that an operation involving a half-dozen fighters would have generated a paper trail along the entire chain of command, making such an event impossible to conceal.

Quite the contrary, the Netherlands East Indies government certainly would have publicized what they would have considered the rightful interception of an airplane that had repeatedly violated their airspace. The world's newspapers might well have run a dramatic photograph of the "notorious Bob Freeberg" in handcuffs. The Dutch would have asserted that Bob had been piloting an aircraft filled with "gold looted from a Dutch mine", supporting the Dutch contention that the blockade runners (and, by implication, the Republican leaders who hired them) were no more than common criminals.

The second scenario, gleefully endorsed by Batavia newspapers, postulated that Bob was simply a "battle-hardened, amoral mercenary" with no qualms about taking the gold for himself. Presumably, he would have flown RI-002 to a remote airstrip where fellow "battle-hardened, amoral mercenaries" waited to kill the crew and take the gold.

Initially, I dismissed this fantastic scenario as worthy of a Hollywood movie, but hardly of serious consideration. For if it were true, it meant that Bob Freeberg, one of the most decent people I have ever met, necessarily would have been an accessory to mass murder.

Unfortunately, the discovery of the wreckage and the bodies of the presumed crew on Mount Punggur three decades afterward only brought the scenario into the realm of possibility. The sweltering, sparsely populated lowlands lying along the flight path from Brantas to Bengkulu have a reputation for lawlessness. Perhaps when flying over this region, Bob might have claimed engine trouble and had been fortunate to spot a stretch of straight, level road where he could make an "emergency landing".

His accomplices would have been waiting in ambush. After disabling the RI-002 radio and flight systems, stranding the crew in this remote location, the robbers might have transported the

gold across the Malacca Strait through well-established smuggling routes. At some obscure port in Malaya, Siam, or Burma Bob would have taken his share and vanished with a new identity. In the meantime, the crew might have rigged makeshift repairs to the Dakota and attempted to fly to the nearest Republican air base, only to suffer catastrophic failure over Mount Punggur.

Though this discovery of the wreckage and bodies absolves Bob of cold-blooded homicide, the question remains of whether he was capable of such a monstrous felony. I knew that Bob was no stranger to the questionable characters found in the shadowy world of East Asian freelance aviation. The deep social and ethnic ties between Malaya and Sumatra would have allowed Bob to arrange with powerful figures in Singapore for armed accomplices on the ground and safe passage for the gold out of Sumatra. And Bob would certainly have been wise enough to recruit a couple of “battle-hardened, amoral mercenaries” to come along for insurance. Though plausible to anyone familiar with the time and place, this scenario rests on whether Bob could have betrayed his employers, colleagues, and friends.

To answer that question, I can only rely on my personal appraisal of Bob's character, formed by long hours in the RI-002 cockpit and similarly lengthy periods sharing a bottle of whiskey during stopovers in Singapore, Manila, or Bangkok. While I firmly believe that even a quarter-ton of gold could not have engendered such a radical reversal of character in an idealist such as Bob Freeberg, I have no real proof that could definitively disprove this dismaying version of events.

The third scenario is the most disturbing of all. It is well known in the local aviation community that several Dutch fighter pilots have boasted of shooting down RI-002 over Sumatra, though none have offered supporting evidence. While an operation involving half of a squadron, like the purported intercept-

tion and landing at Palembang, would have been impossible to conceal, documentation of an encounter involving a single pilot might not exist for any number of reasons, especially if the attacking pilot had lost visual contact in clouds and was unsure of the kill at the time. However, that theory invites the question: What happened to the gold?

The crash site had been discovered twice in a five-year period by local residents roaming the hinterlands in search of land or forest resources. While it is entirely possible that another group had stumbled upon the wreckage and found the gold at some point prior to April 1978, it is implausible that they could have spirited the gold away undetected. Many Indonesians believe that great wealth can be attained by supernatural means. Furthermore, Indonesians in general are notoriously bad at keeping secrets. The inevitable rumors of a mountain where gold can be plucked from the ground like fallen fruit would have spread far and wide, attracting hordes of mystic wealth-seekers to the steep slopes of Mount Punggur.

However the indications are that someone had visited the site before April 1978. In his report, Sulaeman noted that heavy sections of fuselage had been moved and stacked, and that disturbed vegetation had not had sufficient time to regrow. Considering growth rates of vegetation in the Sumatra rain forest, we can assume that a sizable group had visited the site less than a year before Sulaeman's team. If those visitors had taken the gold, they most likely had been members of the Indonesian military. It is reasonable to assume that only a highly disciplined force (such as an elite military unit), could have carried away such a large amount of gold from this remote, rugged location in utter secrecy.

If a military unit had visited the site only to take the gold and leave an important artifact of our history to be reclaimed by the forest, then the commanders would have committed a gross betrayal of the nation they had sworn to serve.

However, I am certain that this hypothetical larcenous field commander and his men would disagree. The meager allowances for operational expenses and even food have long compelled field officers to source supplementary funding for their troops well-being and even survival. In most cases, an officer would forge a relationship with a local businessman, providing protection and logistical support in exchange for a share of revenue. By stripping a remote crash site of buried treasure, an officer could run his outfit, buy a promotion in rank, and support his network of dependents without the risk and bother of participating in an illegal business arrangement.

Our hypothetical officer would not be concerned about the ransacking and concealing the existence of a historic remnant of our struggle for freedom because, generally speaking, Indonesians tend to prefer myth over history. The myth that our independence was secured solely by our own devices: the soaring rhetoric of Soekarno, the tactical genius of our military leaders, the boundless courage of village boys armed only with pointed sticks, has no place for the foreigners, Asian or Western, who assisted us in our struggle for freedom. I wondered if Bob might have unintentionally served the cause of nationalist myth-making by conveniently vanishing off the face of the earth.

6

A CASE OF QUININE

MANILA

June 1947

Suryadarma had assumed that we could sell such a valuable cargo as quinine immediately and return directly to Jogjakarta. Republican currency was worthless outside of Java and Sumatra, so Suryadarma had provided Pang, Boedi and myself with a small amount of American money for incidental expenses during the few days we expected to be in Manila.

We first needed accommodation. Since there was no room to spare in Bob's apartment, which he shared with two other American pilots, Bob took us to the house of his good friend Tom Lee, an attorney working for the United States Veterans Administration office in Manila. It was decided that I would stay with Tom and his family, while Boedi and Pang were taken in by Tom's friend and colleague, Cliff Baldwin.

The following morning, while I savored my first American breakfast, prepared by Tom's lovely wife Marion, Bob appeared. Instead of his customary dress of khaki pants and shirt, Bob wore a tropical suit that struggled to contain his large frame. Bob noticed my surprise, and told me, embarrassed, that he had borrowed the suit from a somewhat smaller friend. That of course, raised the question of why Bob had gone to such lengths to appear well-

groomed. He provided the answer moments later when he asked me to accompany him to a courthouse in the city. Bob explained that he was due in court that morning to argue his side of an ownership dispute over the Dakota now registered as RI-002 and under contract to the Republic of Indonesia. Bob thought it likely that the judge would inquire about the registration and other matters related to the flight to Java, and wanted me there to explain.

This was an unanticipated and disturbing development. Neither Suryadarma nor I had thought to ask Bob whether he was the sole owner of the aircraft on which the survival of the Republic might depend. Now, Bob was telling me that he had, in fact, purchased the war-surplus Dakota the previous January with another young American pilot based in Manila, Bob Walters, sharing the six thousand dollar cost equally. Since Bob's obligations with CALI had left him little free time, the two partners had decided that Bob Walters would take responsibility for relocating the aircraft from the point of purchase at Clarke Field to a private airstrip where they would prepare it for service.

Soon afterward, Bob Walters had insisted that since he had performed the relocation, he was now entitled to a larger share. Bob did not agree, and offered instead to buy Walters out. Walters refused, leaving matters unresolved when Bob again left Manila on CALI charter flights, including the blockade run to Jogjakarta. When Bob returned to Manila, he discovered that Walters had moved the Dakota to another airfield. Bob did not directly confront Walters, but waited until a sympathetic fellow pilot told Bob where the Dakota was now parked.

Freeberg found the Dakota and filed a civil case against Walters in the local court. The judge placed the Dakota in receivership pending his final decision, but granted Freeberg permission to work on the aircraft. However, by this time Bob had resigned from CALI. Without a steady source of income, the costs of the litigation and

refurbishing the Dakota were putting a severe strain on his ever-precarious finances. The sympathetic judge set 11 June 1947 as the date of the court session and granted Bob permission to make one flight out of the Philippines in the meantime for the purpose of a commercial charter. That flight, of course, had been to Java.

In the court, the matter of the contract with the Air Force was not raised, so I was not asked to testify. After hearing from several witnesses and arguments from counsel, the judge decided to call for another session in ten days time. This was only the first of many days I would spend in a Manila court as Bob and I fought for RI-002 and her cargo of quinine.

The spectacle of a decrepit aircraft registered with a hitherto unknown nation with an American captain and Javanese crew generated a media frenzy of curiosity in the following days. This publicity did not escape the notice of the local representatives of the Netherlands. Dutch Consul-General De Voogd formally petitioned the court to seize our cargo of quinine, which he contend- ed had been looted from Dutch plantations and factories. He even claimed custody over the three Javanese crew as Netherlands East Indies subjects! The court dismissed that assertion out of hand, but scheduled a hearing for the following week to resolve the dispute over the ownership of the quinine.

The Dutch engaged the leading law firm DeWitt, Perkins and Ponce Enrile. But our side boasted Salipada Pendatun, a sitting senator as well as a practicing lawyer. Pendatun had taken a great interest in our cause. He was a Moro, born in the predomi- nantly Muslim region in the south of the Philippine archipelago, which has both geographical and cultural proximity to Indonesia. Highly respected for his military exploits during the Japanese oc- cupation of the Philippines, Senator Pendatun was a formidable adversary in court, as the Dutch would soon discover.

As plaintiffs, the Dutch presented their case first. Assuming that we would base our defense upon our presumed rights as a sovereign nation, the opposition threatened to demolish our entire defense at a stroke by seemingly recognizing our right to self-determination. However, the Dutch concept of self-determination was quite distinct from ours. The Dutch stated that the islands of the East Indies would be granted independence only when the populations of the entire archipelago, not just those areas in Java and Sumatra controlled by the Republic, agreed on the structure of a future independent state. Until that day, the Netherlands East Indies government would retain the sole authority to enter into commercial agreements with non-Indonesian counterparts.

The assertion that Indonesia would be independent, just not yet, was indicative of the contradictory and condescending Dutch attitude toward Indonesian self-determination. We believed that the proposed federal structure of semi-autonomous regional states was only the latest expression of the Dutch policy of divide and rule by which this tiny nation on the northern periphery of Europe had for centuries dominated a sprawling archipelago halfway around the world.

First as traders seeking a monopoly on the nutmeg and other valuable spices flourishing in our lush tropical islands, then as marauders forcibly annexing strategic ports to defend their monopoly against English competitors, and finally as a full-blown colonial power controlling every facet of our lives, the Dutch had been an unwelcome presence in our land and seas for more than three centuries. Though Indonesian school textbooks confidently assert that the Dutch had exercised total dominion over the Indonesian archipelago since the days of the Spice Trade, this is only literally true for Batavia, modern Jakarta, and other ports on the north and west coasts of Java. Even then, for half of its existence Batavia was

not the capital of colonial authority. It was basically a company town, the administrative headquarters of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), the Dutch East India Company.

Established by a consortium of Dutch merchants to control the Spice Trade, the VOC was the world's first joint-stock corporation, vertically integrated with its own ships, provisioning ports, and armed forces. Solely concerned with wringing the last drop of profit from their spice monopoly, the VOC plundered and pillaged for generations, sometimes wiping out the populations of whole islands to protect their interests.

The rest of the archipelago, including the heartland of Java, remained under the control of hereditary rulers. Conditions in these areas could be oppressive as well. The rulers made lucrative agreements with the VOC to supply slave labor, or would confiscate large portions of their subjects' crops to sell to the Europeans.

The VOC lost their spice monopoly when English ships managed to smuggle nutmeg seedlings to their own tropical territories, where they flourished. This hammer blow to their bottom line, along with massive corruption, mismanagement, and numerous other factors, resulted in the VOC declaring bankruptcy in 1800. The Netherlands government took over VOC assets, beginning a process of formal colonization that would only be completed a century later.

It was not a benign colonial system. The expenses of administering the large islands of Java and Sumatra, along with coastal areas of other regions, proved daunting. To increase revenue, the government implemented a system of forced crop deliveries. The infamous *Cultuurstelsel*, the Cultivation System, compelled farmers to devote a certain portion of their land to growing commercially valuable crops such as sugar and coffee to be sold to the Dutch through local intermediaries at a fixed price.

Though the obligation was initially manageable, the success of the Cultivation System and the greed of local elites pushed

the practice far beyond the point of sustainability. Already impoverished farmers could only bow their heads and comply as their own nobles compelled them to dig up ever-larger tracks of rice land to plant cash crops. But the low price they received would never suffice to purchase the amount of food they once grew to feed their families. Whole communities were decimated by overwork and under-nourishment.

In the 1820s, the egregious corruption and brutality of the native aristocracy sparked a rebellion led by Diponegoro, the idealistic crown prince of Jogjakarta. The Dutch won the Java War by tricking Diponegoro into capture and exile, then consolidated their authority throughout the heartland. Though the sultanates remained absolute monarchies in theory, each king was assigned a Dutch counterpart, called the Resident. The body language and composition of official portraits (and later photographs) of the ruling pair left no doubt where the real power lay.

In the eastern islands, the Dutch found natural allies in the corrupt petty kings who were willing, if not eager, to burden their subjects with oppressive taxation and forced-labor obligations. And everywhere, native-born Indonesians could not even aspire to second-class citizenship in their own motherland. That dubious privilege was reserved for those non-Europeans who served commercial interests, such as the large population of ethnic-Chinese migrants who handled much of the trading and distribution of rice and other essential goods throughout the archipelago.

Not all regions surrendered willingly. The Acehnese, the fiercely Islamic peoples of the northern tip of Sumatra, fought a savage war of resistance for decades, while the kingdoms of southern Bali maintained a precarious sovereignty until they, too, were conquered at the turn of the Twentieth Century. But the total dominion of the Netherlands over the East Indies would last for only a few decades. In the first months of 1942 the Japanese

swept through the archipelago. The colonial government fled to Australia. Those Dutch (and other enemies of the Japanese) who stayed behind were summarily transported to internment camps.

The Pacific War ended in August 1945. Within weeks, several battalions of British troops arrived to expedite the evacuation of European internees. In the interim, the Republicans were able to consolidate their power, building a rudimentary but effective administrative structure in both urban and rural areas of Java and Sumatra. In other regions, they enlisted the support of local aristocrats, who had asserted their hereditary rights to rule to avoid a disastrous power vacuum.

In January 1946, the Dutch colonial officials returned from wartime exile in Australia and set to work reestablishing their administrative structure district-by-district as resources became available. However, they soon realized that reasserting colonial authority would not be as simple as reoccupying their desks in government offices. During the first weeks of January, the returning colonial officials set up their own administration in districts with government offices, major businesses, and elite residential areas, leaving control of native neighborhoods to the Republicans. Batavia became a patchwork of jurisdictions. In the course of a brief stroll, a person might pass through several colonial and Republican-controlled districts each with distinct policing and municipal services. Neither side was willing to cede authority over their turf, so sporadic street fighting was inevitable.

Before these disturbances flared into a full-fledged conflagration, the Republicans staged a strategic retreat to the heartland of Java. At the invitation of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, the Soekarno government relocated from Batavia to the historic town of Jogjakarta. There, in the shadow of the high walls of the royal palace (a potent, enduring symbol of Javanese resistance to Dutch rule) the new Republic would attempt to consolidate their authority and push for independence for all of Indonesia.

During the following months, Republican support grew rapidly, severely hampering Dutch efforts to reestablish the colonial government. Eventually, the Dutch were forced to acknowledge that pro-Republican sentiment dominated in most areas of Java and Sumatra, while the Dutch were weakened from their own wartime privations. They decided to negotiate.

In November 1946, representatives of the Dutch colonial administration and the Republic of Indonesia met in Linggarjati in the highlands of western Java. Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir led the Indonesian team. One of a coterie of Dutch-educated intellectuals who became the theoreticians of the nationalist movement, Sjahrir strove to establish European-style representative democratic institutions to govern the new republic.

Across the table sat the team led by Acting Governor-General Hubertus van Mook. Born in Semarang, a prosperous port on the north coast of Java, van Mook was an Indo, the term for Dutch citizens whose families had lived in the Netherlands East Indies for more than one generation. The Indos regarded these islands, not the small maritime nation on the other side of the globe, as their homeland.

Van Mook proposed the establishment of a semi-autonomous Netherlands-Indonesian Union, in which the former colony would be broken up into self-governing states along ethnic lines. These states, including the Republic of Indonesia, would then be absorbed into a federation, along with the Dutch colonies of Ghana and Suriname, under the nominal sovereignty of the Dutch constitutional monarchy. Though van Mook believed that the traditional colonial system was best consigned to the history books, and that each state should have the freedom to determine their own laws and customs, he also believed that Indonesians, if left by themselves, were not capable of managing a modern economy.

In the proposed federal system Van Mook championed, each state would have equal power, but the Dutch government would be “first among equals”, with authority to override all major decisions, for an indefinite period. Bali, Sulawesi, and some other areas in the eastern region of the archipelago immediately accepted this arrangement. In late 1946 they established Negara Indonesia Timur, the State of Eastern Indonesia. Commonly known by the initials, NIT, the new state professed Republican ideals, even adopting Indonesia Raya, the Republican national anthem. We in the Republic itself did not hide our contempt of what we considered a puppet state, claiming that NIT actually stood for *Negara Ikut Tuan*, the state that follows the master.

A half-year later, in Manila, the Dutch lawyers touted the Linggarjati agreement as evidence that the Dutch were on the right side of history, proof that they would eventually grant us some form of independence. But our team adroitly changed strategy, recasting the dispute in purely legalistic terms. We asserted that under international law, a colony in the process of gaining independence had the right to negotiate international commercial arrangements.

To support our contention, we cited several cases of governments-in-waiting being granted the right to conduct international trade as they prepared for full sovereignty. Opposing counsel then sidestepped the issue by noting that the quinine had been harvested from Dutch-owned plantations and processed at Dutch facilities, so the Republic of Indonesia could not claim ownership of the goods in dispute. Our team countered that the Dutch authorities had abandoned the quinine by fleeing to Australia ahead of the invading Japanese, leaving the factory in the hands of the Indonesian staff.

The plaintiff's lawyer dismissed this argument out of hand, and in doing so made a serious tactical error. In front of the judge (who was, of course, a native citizen of the Philippines) he claimed that Indonesian natives (and by inference colonized people in gen-

eral) did not possess the technical ability to process raw material into quinine. Therefore, the cargo must have been processed by the Dutch before the war. Even if it could be proved that the Japanese had processed the quinine during the occupation, the Dutch could still claim the cargo as war reparations.

To bolster their case, the Dutch legal team had flown in an agricultural researcher from the Netherlands. This expert would testify that no factories were functioning during or after the Japanese occupation and therefore the Indonesians could not have manufactured quinine for export.

Our side looked forward to cross-examining this witness, hoping that we could portray him as an arrogant and condescending white colonial. But Pendatun wisely opted for a much safer route. He objected to the witness giving testimony on the grounds that “a foreigner is not qualified to comment on the internal affairs of the Republic of Indonesia”. That statement went over well both in court and in the media, as the Republic of the Philippines had only the previous year won their own independence from the Americans. The judge refused to allow the witness to take the stand, and closed the hearing to deliberate the case. Having done our best, we could now only stand by and wait for a final decision to be rendered.

JAVANESE CELEBRITY

MANILA

July 1947

Early one morning in July 1947, my fitful sleep on the floor of a boarding-house room in Manila was broken by frantic knocking. With the ownership of the quinine still in dispute, Boedi, Pang, and I could not return to Jogjakarta. Nor could we continue to impose on the generous hospitality of Tom Lee and Cliff Baldwin. So the three of us had found this cramped room, laid down three frayed straw mats, and made the best of the situation.

I rose, and opened the door to find two travel-rumpled but dignified Indonesian men. Heads popped out of adjacent doorways. Language difficulties had hampered communication with our fellow lodgers, mostly itinerant laborers from rural areas. They assumed that Pang, Boedi, and myself (three young men with few belongings sharing a small room) were job-seekers from some distant island in the Philippine archipelago. They further assumed that our well-dressed visitors were recruiting us for a day's manual labor and hoped that they might be hired as well.

In fact, the men calling on us were Soedjatmoko, future Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations, and the eminent Dr. Soemitro Djojohadikusumo, who would guide the process of formulating and implementing the economic policies of

an independent Indonesia in the decades to come. Soedjatmoko and Soemitro were making a grand loop through Southeast Asia, soliciting international support before traveling to New York to open a representative office for the Republic of Indonesia. They were now requesting the assistance of the Republic of Indonesia's ad-hoc military liaison team to the Republic of the Philippines (Pang and myself) to arrange a meeting with President Manuel Roxas.

I turned to our lawyer and mentor Senator Pendatun, who was close to Roxas. His skilled legal representation in our court case was the first of many services Pendatun would render our new nation. In the months to come Pendatun would serve as a top-level liaison between the new republics of the Philippines and Indonesia.

The brief meeting with President Roxas went well. Roxas believed that the two Southeast Asian republics had many common interests and should be mutually supportive. He promised to advocate on our behalf at the United Nations. This marked the first significant victory in the diplomatic offensive that (along with our military action) would eventually defeat the Dutch and secure our freedom.

While Soemitro and Soedjatmoko canvassed heads of state, I directed my efforts to drumming up local support for our cause. I felt this to be a top priority and the best use of my extended stay in Manila. Besides the diplomatic support pledged by President Roxas, the Republic of the Philippines was in a position to play an important practical role in our struggle. The huge military facilities at Clarke Field and Subic Bay were filled with surplus war materiel, and veteran American pilots, such as Bob, filled the bars waiting for work. A widespread awareness of our struggle might help us to find and recruit pilots and others who would be useful to our cause.

Until that time Indonesia was virtually unknown in Manila. In government, within the military, or on the street, some may

have heard of the distant rumble in the south. Generally, though, the new Republic of the Philippines was too busy establishing itself firmly in the post-war family of nations to care about an uprising in the Netherlands East Indies.

This all changed when RI-002 landed in Manila. Stories about Captain Freeberg and his “Javanese crew” appeared frequently in the newspapers, even pushing out news of a sensational kidnap-murder case. Their curiosity piqued by the media coverage, numerous student and professional associations approached us for information about the struggle for self-determination being fought by their southern neighbors. As senior officer and having the best command of English, I took on the role of official spokesperson for the Republic. I spent many pleasant and stimulating hours explaining how we transformed ourselves from oppressed colony to sovereign nation to inquisitive and highly appreciative audiences.

I would begin my talks with the surprising admission that our struggle for self-determination started with a Dutchman. Eduard Douwes Dekker sailed to the East Indies in 1838 as a junior colonial administrator. During the subsequent decade, as he moved from post to post throughout the archipelago, Douwes Dekker witnessed the worst abuses of the Cultivation System. He made no secret of his outrage, and so was encouraged into early retirement from the civil service in 1851.

Back in the home country, Douwes Dekker devoted his time to writing searing exposés of the colonial administration. When his strident pamphlets failed to arouse indignation (or even interest), Douwes Dekker changed tactics. He presented his denunciations in the form of a droll narrative: the ostensible ghostwritten memoirs of a Dutch coffee trader. *Max Havelaar: Or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*, deftly eviscerated

the pretensions of the Dutch merchant class while exposing and condemning the brutality of the Cultivation System and the endemic corruption it supported.

Max Havelaar caused a sensation in Europe, where progressive social movements were gaining ground against class privilege and oppression. The embarrassment caused by *Max Havelaar*, and the growing awareness that the current system was not sustainable, eventually pushed the government to abandon the Cultivation System in favor of the *Ethische Politiek*, the “Ethical Policy”, which emphasized the welfare and education of indigenous inhabitants.

A key component of the new policy was a system of Dutch-curriculum schools for the native elite, aimed at creating a cadre of administrators and skilled technical workers imbued with progressive social values. On graduation, many of the best and brightest enrolled in the *Doktor Jawa* program in the *School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen*, School for the Training of Native Physicians, or STOVIA, in Batavia. The *Doktor Jawa* program addressed another Ethical Policy concern: the almost complete absence of public-health services outside of the European enclaves. The STOVIA students were trained to treat minor injuries and dispense medicines for common diseases, especially smallpox. Essentially halfway between a nurse and a physician, the sizable corps of *Doktor Jawa* produced by STOVIA did have a significant impact in bringing rudimentary health care to thousands of villages—itself a revolutionary development.

But the real legacy of STOVIA would grow from the extracurricular activities of the *Doktor Jawa* students. The native elite considered STOVIA to be a prestigious institution. Leading families from Java, Sumatra, and other regions of the Netherlands East Indies sent their sons to study in Batavia. This is where the Dutch made their fatal error. Bringing together young men with good educations generated a lively exchange of views and experi-

ences. New ideas were propagated back to the regions though the extensive family and social connections of the students, engendering a wide-spread realization that even peoples from opposite ends of the archipelago had a great deal in common.

The result was the formation in 1908 of *Boedi Oetomo*, Noble Endeavor, an organization to promote the concept that the various peoples of the archipelago, though of different ethnicity, cultural expression, and religious belief, shared core values and a common heritage. *Boedi Oetomo* sparked the establishment of other organizations forming around social and professional groups, giving rise to the mass organizations and political parties that, in many cases, continue to influence public life in contemporary times. As throughout modern Indonesian history, students were the vanguard of the nationalist movement. In 1928, a regional youth conference devised the rallying cry for the Indonesian nation: the *Sumpah Pemuda*, the solemn pledge to uphold “One Nation, One People, One Language.”

The “one language” was the key. As the nationalist movement gained momentum and conferences attracted participants from throughout the many isles of the Netherlands East Indies, they found themselves compelled to address gatherings in Dutch, their only common tongue being the language of their despised overlords. The logical first choice for a universal language would have been Javanese, spoken by the majority of inhabitants of this vast archipelago. But Javanese is not the easiest language to learn: different word forms and even vocabulary are used depending on the relative social status of speaker and listener. This linguistic structure reinforces the feudal attitudes that the Dutch used so successfully to secure their rule. Instead, the nationalists wisely chose a form of Malay used for centuries as a lingua franca by traders throughout Southeast Asia. Supplemented by wholesale importation of Sanskrit, Arabic, English, and even Dutch terms, it rapidly developed into the rich and sophisticated Bahasa Indonesia, the language of the Indonesians.

Armed with a communication tool that cut across cultural and social boundaries, the nationalist movement gained considerable influence. At first, we gave the Dutch little cause for complaint. The writings of our leaders and theorists, all grounded in progressive Western political philosophy and bound by our own cultural traditions of avoiding outright confrontation, played right into the European respect for freedom of speech. But the growing influence of the nationalist leaders, and the noise generated by our strident young cadres, finally pushed the Dutch into action. By the 1930s, the colonial government had cracked down on nationalist activities, imprisoning or exiling all opponents, from senior leaders to rank-and-file organizers.

In my childhood home in Madiun, nationalism was a taboo subject of discussion. My father was a *patih*, a civil administrator. His position was a single step down from the *bupati*, the ranking “native” administrator responsible for a district with hundreds of thousands of households. The foundation of Dutch power in Java was this system of governing through indigenous civil servants. The system was basically feudal, with the native officials serving solely at the pleasure of the Dutch authorities. Not surprisingly, most *patih* devoted much of their time and energy (when not lining their own pockets) to ensuring that they maintained a favorable impression in the eyes of their alien overlords so as to attain the position of *bupati*, at the same time preparing at least one of their sons to enter the civil service and take their place upon retirement.

My father, on the other hand, strongly discouraged my brother and me from setting our sights on a career in the native bureaucracy, saying: “Before you become *bupati* you will never be a free man.” Sadly, he would never enjoy his freedom. He died suddenly in 1936, shortly after he was placed on the short list for promotion to *bupati* in our district.

Out of our father's earshot, my siblings and I engaged in lively discussions about the nationalist movement. Kempoel, my eldest sister, was the most outspoken. Well regarded by her teachers at the junior high school in Madiun because of her fluency in Dutch, Kempoel nonetheless always carried a small *merah-putih*, the red-and-white flag that was the symbol of our nationalist movement, in her purse. One day, however, there was a theft reported at the school and all handbags were to be searched. With a shock Kempoel remembered that she had the *merah-putih* hidden between her books.

Fortunately, distress brought out her ingenuity. Kempoel hid the flag in the only place available, in her sandwich. At lunch, she discovered that the red dye from the new flag had seeped into the butter. Kempoel knew that she might raise suspicion by not eating, and at any rate she was famished, so she quickly gulped the sandwich down. That resulted in one of her few demerits. A teacher noticed the red stain on her lips, and admonished her for wearing lipstick in school!

My family laughs when remembering this incident, but we do not forget that Kempoel and our father would have been in serious trouble had she been discovered. In the next years, teenagers like Kempoel would realize that expressing nationalist sentiments was not just mild rebellion, but a matter of life and death.

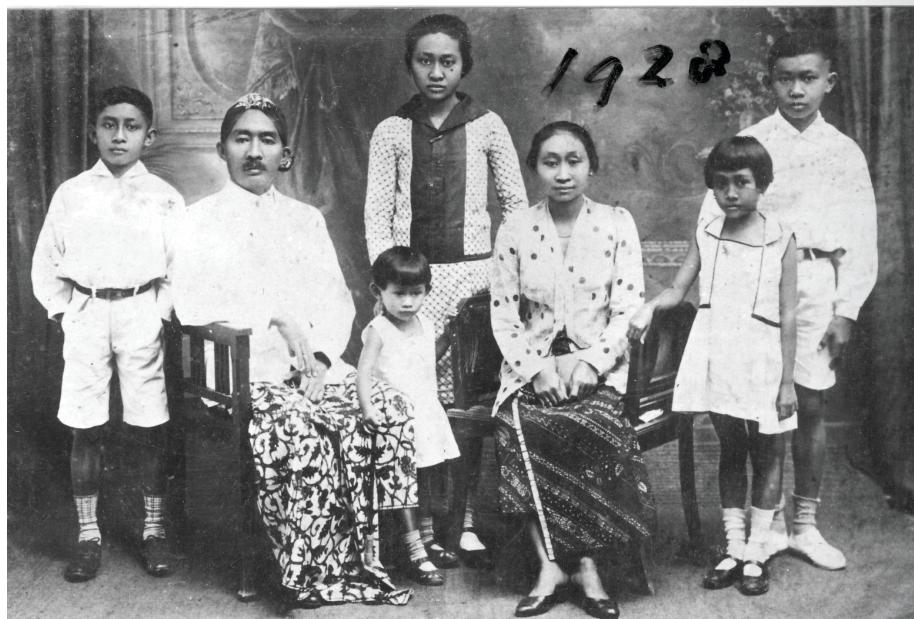
While my sister wisely concealed her passionate conviction for the nationalist cause in order to work within the system, others broadcast their views to the world. Madiun, especially, was becoming a hot bed of dissent. Among the most outspoken activists was a young firebrand named Soediro. Although the whole civil service corps in Madiun kept a watchful eye on this man, my father somehow liked and sympathized with the young teacher, now married and with a small child.

Deep in his heart my father admired the man his superiors viewed as a dangerous radical. One day, my father was informed that Soediro was blacklisted and would soon be sentenced to exile in Boven Digoel.

This was serious. Boven Digoel was a malaria-ridden hell-hole deep in the jungles of Dutch New Guinea established to hold political activists detained during the communist-instigated social uprisings of the 1920s. Ten years on, nationalists now constituted a large fraction of the inmate population. In Boven Digoel, they had little contact with the outside world, and, I suspect, the Dutch hoped they would conveniently succumb to some tropical disease.

My father was determined to have this harsh sentence revoked. He pleaded with the resident, the highest civil authority in the Madiun area. He must have been quite convincing, as the sentence was indeed revoked, but on the condition that Soediro pack up and leave Madiun forever.

But the Dutch colonists could not hope to stem the tide of nationalism. As the colony prospered between the wars, the growing need to source labor for mines, oil fields, and plantations brought individuals from throughout the archipelago to work together, and often to marry and raise families far from their home villages. In the melting pots of Batavia, Surabaya, and Medan, the common people of the archipelago, like the educated elite of a previous generation, discovered that fundamental similarities in core social values and approaches to religious belief far outweighed minor differences in local rituals and customs. Whether a Javanese farmer watching a wayang shadow-puppet performance in the hot plains of central Java, a Batak plantation worker praying in his cool highland church, or a Bugis seafarer battling the waves on his *pinisi* cargo schooner; all of the peoples of the vast East Indies archipelago comprised a single nation: Indonesia.



Petit Muharto (left) with
parents and siblings
in 1928.



Petit Muharto (left) and his brother Peded Muhardi pose with the Japanese soldier assigned to monitor the activities of the prominent Kartodirdjo family during the occupation.

pepper me with questions, eager to learn every detail of a struggle for freedom that had been much like their own. My talks generated significant attention in the press and among diplomatic circles, which greatly annoyed the Dutch legation. Decades later, I would be delighted to see my name mentioned in Dutch government archives. In a dispatch to his minister of foreign affairs, the Dutch consul general in Manila told of a meeting with Philippines Vice President Elpidio Quirino. In the meeting, Quirino had spontaneously promised to curtail my “propaganda for the Indonesian cause among Filipino youths”. However, the government would take no action against me, nor even express the slightest disapproval of my efforts.

I suspect Quirino was purposely leading the Dutch astray because, on another, wholly clandestine level, the Philippines military was actively supporting our cause. Pang and I managed to form close ties with the intelligence corps of the Philippines army, who would assist us greatly with logistic and other support on subsequent blockade runs. Like the medical students from far-flung islands forging alliances while chatting over coffee in the STOVIA canteen, Filipinos and Indonesians now pledged mutual support in the struggle to build modern nations where once had stood colonial backwaters.

8

DUTCH AGGRESSION

MANILA

July 1947

With plenty of time but little money during our extended sojourn in Manila, we sought to busy ourselves as best we could. A favorite activity was to visit news stands to scan the foreign newspapers and magazines for reports about the situation in the Republic. These imported publications were expensive, so when we encountered an informative article, we might pool our funds to purchase a copy. In most cases, however, one of us would read the piece as rapidly as possible before being chased away by the owner.

Our other major source of news was the radio set in the common area of our boarding house. This was the sole means of entertainment for the tenants, and usually tuned to stations playing popular music or comedy performances. This radio was also capable of receiving short-wave broadcasts. On most evenings Boedi, Pang, and I would gather around the set to listen to international news programs, including those from our own Radio Republic Indonesia station in Jogjakarta, until the other tenants insisted that we tune back to a local station.

However, throughout the afternoon and evening of 21 July 1947, we were deaf to their entreaties as we listened with mounting horror to reports of a Dutch invasion of Republican terri-

tory. We learned that mechanized columns had swept out from Batavia, Bandung, and Surabaya to invade almost all of the areas held by the Republic. In Java, the Dutch took control of all deep-water ports. In Sumatra, they secured plantations and oil and coal installations around populated areas. Caught by surprise, our forces could only vanish into the hinterland or retreat to Jogjakarta to make a last stand.

Throughout the day, we waited for news that Jogjakarta had fallen. But by late afternoon, the troops in Java had halted their advance a few score kilometers to the north of the city. We would realize later that the Dutch had only wanted control over the agricultural and other resources they needed to support the one hundred thousand troops that had been brought in to retake control of the archipelago. In view of the heavy losses that would be incurred from a direct assault on the capital, they opted instead to starve us into submission.

That day also saw the Dutch lose possession of another, highly symbolic agricultural product. The court had finally handed down its verdict over the ownership of the quinine—in our favor! The customs office was instructed to release to us the cargo of quinine. This was a milestone victory for the Republic. For the first time, a neutral legal authority had validated our claims of legitimacy.

The court victory and the appalling news from the south rekindled interest in our cause among the Filipinos. I redoubled my propaganda efforts, granting interviews and speaking to student groups and other associations eager to learn about our struggle. When speaking at a university, my hosts would make note of my academic credentials, introducing me as the medical student turned pilot.

Of course I was not a pilot. I had only identified myself as the RI-002 co-pilot to the Filipino aviation authorities to save

Bob from possible penalties or even a suspension of his captain's license for not meeting the crew requirements of an international flight in a Dakota. But the medical student part was perfectly true.

I enrolled in medical school in 1938. This was not the *Doktor Jawa* program of an earlier era: I would graduate with the equivalent of a European degree in medicine. I was diligent in my studies, and looked forward to an interesting and useful career as a physician. When I started my final year in 1941 I was not aware of events that would soon change the trajectory of my career, and of history.

An ancient Javanese prophesy states that a white buffalo will plow the earth for centuries, but will be driven off by a horde of yellow monkeys, who will remain in Java for the life of a corn plant. The Japanese swept through Southeast Asia in the weeks after Pearl Harbor, driving the Dutch from all areas of the archipelago by mid-1942. As prophesied, the Japanese occupied Indonesia for about three years, in that period overturning the social and political structure of the archipelago and setting the stage for Indonesian independence.

Initially, we regarded the Japanese as fellow-Asian liberators, and were only too happy to lend our assistance. Of course, our views quickly changed after it became apparent that the Japanese were even more oppressive than our previous overlords. In an inequitable redistribution of wealth unmatched since the days of the Cultivation System, the Japanese bought at low prices (or confiscated outright) crops and other resources needed to feed their war machine. Thousands of my fellow Indonesians were sent to labor camps. Though not subjected to the brutal horrors endured by the enemy internees, many succumbed to disease and malnutrition.

As a medical-school student, I was allowed to remain in Batavia and continue my studies. But my comfortable academic life ended when a fellow student was slapped in the face by

our Japanese instructor in front of the entire class. This was an intolerable humiliation for a high-born Javanese person. I led a protest against the instructor and was immediately imprisoned along with eight of my classmates. We spent a hellish week in a Japanese military prison and were then expelled. Fearing exile to a labor camp now that I was no longer in university, I fled Batavia for Semarang, where I kept a low profile and found employment as a high-school teacher.

Other Indonesians with useful skills (and the temperament to keep their peace in the face of Japanese arrogance) were put in technical positions recently vacated by the Dutch. This would have far-lasting consequences. The “natives” that the Dutch insisted were too unskilled and irresponsible to be entrusted with the management of public utilities were now running the trains, lighting the streets, and regulating the distribution of all-important irrigation water for our rice fields. Our self confidence grew as each day we proved that Dutch paternalism had been both pernicious and completely without justification. When, eventually, the Japanese departed, we would be fully prepared to become not only the masters of our own homeland, but the managers, engineers, and technicians as well.

Nine days after the Dutch invaded and occupied our homeland, we had our revenge. On the morning of 29 July 1947, two squadrons of refurbished Japanese aircraft took off from Maguwo and headed toward Dutch military bases near Semarang. In a symbolic gesture of defiance, our pilots dropped a few small bombs on the facilities, injuring no one and causing little damage. Nevertheless, the legendary Ambarawa Raid dealt a devastating blow to Dutch complacency.

That afternoon, the Dutch would score their own victory with far more devastating consequences. Shortly before nightfall, two Dutch Kitty Hawk fighters shot down a blockade-running Dakota as it approached Maguwo, killing all on board.



Petit Muharto at medical
school in 1941

The aircraft, VT-CLA, had been a frequent visitor to Maguwo that year, bringing in medical and other supplies from India. It had also served as clandestine transport to India for military personnel and high officials. The most recent mission had been to fly Sutan Sjahrir's children to the safety of an Indian boarding school after the Dutch aggression of the previous week. On that tragic day VT-CLA was returning from Singapore, carrying as passengers Agustinus Adisucipto, the pilot who had rebuilt and flown the iconic Banteng biplane, and another senior aviator, Abdurrahman Saleh. Authorities in Batavia had been informed through their intelligence operatives in Singapore that two senior Air Force aviators would be on the flight. With this information, the Dutch attempted to portray the Dakota as a military transport and Alexander Constantine, the RAF veteran piloting the aircraft, as a mercenary.

With VT-CLA gone, the Republic was now truly isolated. The Dutch aggression had reduced our proud Republic into an overcrowded, impoverished enclave in central Java and a handful of outposts on Sumatra's windswept west coast. Our only hope of regular contact with the outside world lay in RI-002. But we were stuck in Manila, our cargo unsold, and no funds at our disposal. As refugees poured into Jogjakarta and the Dutch consolidated their military advantage, we could only sit in a distant land and wait.

9

DOWN AND OUT IN MANILA

MANILA

August 1947

The Dutch aggression dramatically increased the urgency of bringing the conflict in the former Netherlands East Indies to the attention of the United Nations Security Council. In New York, Soemitro and Soedjatmoko lobbied to place the “Indonesia Question” on the council agenda. During July and August the council debated the legitimacy of Indonesia’s claims to nationhood. Australia championed her neighbor to the north by characterizing the Dutch aggression and subsequent skirmishes as armed conflict between two states in international law, while other members noted that the Linggarjati agreement asserted the independent status of Indonesian states.

Only representatives of sovereign states may be seated at the Security Council. Indonesia chose Sutan Sjahrir for the honor. A nationalist leader of equal stature to Soekarno and Hatta, Sutan Sjahrir had served as prime minister during the two first years of independence, then had resigned to concentrate on garnering international support for our nation’s cause. Fiercely intelligent and regarded as a voice of reason and civility among the many radicals and demagogues on all sides, Sutan Sjahrir was the natural choice to represent Indonesia on the world stage.

On 14 August 1947, the Dutch representatives could only curse under their breath as Sutan Sjahrir entered the Security Council chamber and took his assigned seat. He gave a brief history of the nationalist movement, noting that a widespread sense of national awareness throughout the archipelago far predicated the Japanese occupation. He demolished the Dutch arguments point-by-point, and asked that the Security Council appoint a commission to arbitrate the dispute between the Republic of Indonesia and the Netherlands.

Sjahrir's persuasive address gained our cause considerable support in the United Nations, as many delegates and functionaries held strong anti-colonial views. The United States offered to establish the committee requested by Sjahrir, with itself as the neutral member. Australia stepped forward to represent Indonesia; while Holland's neighbor, Belgium, a nation with its own notorious history of colonial exploitation in Africa, represented the Netherlands.

In September 1947, the Committee of Good Offices was dispatched to visit the Republican-controlled areas of the East Indies and make recommendations to the Security Council. The distinguished committee members assumed this task with the best of intentions and the worst of prospects. With no real authority beyond the perceived moral stature of the United Nations, the GOC, as it was generally known, could only act as the voice of reason in a situation dominated by bluster and posturing.

While our senior diplomats were being feted by world statesmen in New York, Boedi, Pang, and I were struggling to survive in Manila. The high spirits we felt when the court granted us the right to sell our cargo of quinine (and the vanilla, which had not been in dispute) evaporated as we realized that finding buyers would be very difficult. We estimated that the cargo would be

worth anywhere from fifteen to thirty thousand dollars. However, in the Philippines, the local merchants were not familiar with dried vanilla beans or with quinine in powdered form.

“That's a lot of ice-cream,” people would say about the eleven cases of vanilla. When Boedi was diagnosed with malaria, people would exclaim in mock astonishment: “How is that possible? You have a plane full of quinine!”

The meager amounts Suryadarma had given us for our daily living expenses soon vanished. By mid July, Pang, Boedi, and I were subsisting on one meal a day: a plate of madras curry taken at an eating house located a kilometer from our boarding house.

Bob was in similarly dire straits having spent most of his ready cash refurbishing the Dakota and paying legal fees accrued during his fight with Bob Walters. Though Bob generally ate at his apartment, he would often make a point of joining us for our single daily meal. In fact, Bob did not have to share our discomforts to this degree. His former employer, CALI, assured Bob that he could return to the company at any time. But Bob was adamant on making a go of it himself. Bob truly believed that he was still our captain, and would not abandon us until he had safely returned his crew to Java.

While satisfying, my “propaganda” activities did little to help our financial situation. At most, I might receive a cup of coffee and a snack after speaking to an association of students or professionals.

On one occasion, though, after a warmly received lecture to the Women's Lawyers Association, I was presented with a cash honorarium. Though these affluent professionals clearly regarded the gift as simply a symbolic gesture of moral support, such was our dire economic straits that even this modest sum made a significant improvement in our situation. However, when I told Bob of my windfall, his sharp and unexpected retort was:

“Never accept anything for nothing.”

Tom Lee also provided occasional respite from our financial distress. We would often meet for a beer or dinner along with Bob, but sometimes Tom would invite only Boedi, Pang, and myself and insist on treating us to a substantial meal. On these occasions, Tom would encourage us to talk about our blockade-running adventures. Once having been a desk jockey myself, I could well imagine Tom's desire to vicariously experience our adventures.

Tom was also eager to hear my views about life in the Republic. He seemed knowledgeable about the Byzantine internal politics of our revolution: the constantly shifting alliances among regional, religious, and military factions. Tom would ask detailed, incisive questions about the military and political leaders I met during the course of my duties, and of the general attitude and commitment to the Republic of the common people I met in daily life.

I was thrilled that Tom wished to truly understand our struggle. Tom was a senior government employee with an extensive network of contacts in Washington. I hoped that he might communicate my descriptions of our heartfelt commitment to freedom to his colleagues, and perhaps even suggest reconsideration of America's unequivocal support for the Dutch.

While Sutan Sjahrir was brilliantly making the case for Indonesian self-determination before the Security Council, Bob was making his case, (perhaps not as brilliantly but with equal passion) for the ownership of RI-002. Like the Republic, Bob faced an intransigent, sometimes irrational, opponent. Bob Walters had a reputation among the foreign pilots as a liar and a thief. Tom suspected that Walters had already sold his share of the Dakota to another party and was intentionally dragging on proceedings to conceal this characteristic bit of chicanery.

Senator Pendatun offered to use his position to launch an investigation against Walters, with the goal of having him deported as an undesirable alien. Tom strongly advised against this.

Though getting rid of Walters would solve the immediate problem, the failure to bring the case to a definitive legal conclusion would likely cause difficulties in the future.

Bob agreed, and resigned himself to be patient while the wheels of justice continued their stately rotation. I, too, was relieved. The legal dispute gave the Dutch yet another excuse to paint Bob as a freebooting adventurer of dubious business ethics, not the wholly legitimate aviation-services supplier I knew him to be. I anticipated the day when the court ruled in Bob's favor and he took uncontested possession of the aircraft we proudly called RI-002.

Of the three of us, Boedi had the least difficulty making friends in Manila. Fluent in English and quick to laugh, he became quite popular among the foreign adventurers living in or passing through Manila. Through conversations with these foreigners, Boedi was able to learn about Bob's life before that fateful flight to Java—information Bob was reluctant to volunteer on his own.

Bob had returned to Manila in October 1946, a few months after being demobilized from the US Navy. Because Bob had joined the war relatively late, after cessation of hostilities in the Pacific Theater in August 1945 he continued on active duty while most of his fellow officers boarded ships destined for home. During the rest of the year, Bob hopped among assignments around the Pacific and Australia assisting to decommission allied air bases.

When Bob finally did return to Kansas, he discovered that most of the available positions in commercial aviation had already been filled by the wave of returning veterans. Furthermore, married men were given preference for any new piloting jobs. Bob was faced with the prospect of putting aside his passion for flight and joining his father at the railroad, the largest employer in the town.

Instead, Bob wrote to pilots of his acquaintance who had elected to stay in Asia after their discharge. All held Bob in the highest professional regard, marveling at the ability of "Fearless

Freeberg" to land any type of aircraft on a dime. In time, I, too, would learn to take my friend's extraordinary piloting skills for granted, and could relax in the air knowing that what seemed to be reckless maneuvers were, in fact, executed well within his ability to keep the aircraft under perfect control.

Bob's reputation among the aviators led to a generous offer by Commercial Air Lines Incorporated (CALI), an air-charter company based in Manila. Within days of his arrival, Bob was in the co-pilot seat of a CALI C-47, flying cargo and passengers to and from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok.

Civilian aviation was booming in the region. Local businessmen who had survived the war with their fortunes intact bought up war-surplus troop carriers and freighters for minimal sums. With clients throughout East Asia clamoring for service as the war-torn nations and colonies rebuilt their economies, the newly minted air barons sought out adventurous veteran aviators from the victorious nations, particularly the United States, Britain, and Australia.

Volatile politics and armed insurgencies provided endless opportunities to seasoned pilots willing to offer their services to nationalist rebels, beleaguered colonial governments, and anyone else with sufficient cash in hand and something that needed to be transported across hostile territories. Bob immediately became a member in good standing of the Aviation Brotherhood, a loose-knit professional association dedicated to mutual support and to boisterous relief of the stresses of their high-risk occupation. Most members of this band of brothers were simply professional pilots, like Bob, who had been unable to find suitable employment in their home countries, all of which had a post-war surfeit of experienced aviators. Others were restless veterans seeking to recapture the thrill and danger of battle. A few were borderline criminals, who openly boasted of enormous profits made running weapons, opium, and other contraband.

With few qualified local aviators available, the Southeast Asian air barons were almost entirely dependent on the foreign pilots who, at any moment, could leave in search of bluer skies. That realization, combined with natural Asian hospitality, thrust Bob into a world wholly unlike the work-a-day life of a commercial airline pilot in the United States.

At every overnight stop (and often at his base in Manila) Bob was feted like a prince, with multiple invitations for drinks, dinner, and nightclubbing from clients and relatives of his employer—even total strangers. Bob's farm-boy appetite would be put to the test with lavish banquets. To his credit, Bob would try any unfamiliar dish at least once. He grew to love the spicy curries that characterize many regional cuisines.

There was also no shortage of after-hours diversion for this tall, strong-bodied, pleasant-faced, soft-spoken American. Bob was too much of a gentleman to indulge in locker-room bragging about his adventures with women, and I suspect that what details he did confide in me over a bottle of whiskey were only part of the story.

Bob had great sympathy and respect for these young women, many of whom had experienced terrible suffering during the Japanese occupation. He could understand their desire to find an American husband and the opportunity to seek a stable, comfortable life in the United States. What amused him were the daughters of families living at Clarke and Subic Bay military bases. Bob and the other single pilots were the constant objects of advances by the daughters. They were also under the scrutiny of the mothers trying to determine whether the young man her daughter fancied was a dissolute fly-boy or a serious career-seeker who could be relied upon to provide for a family. The consensus seemed to be that Bob would, indeed, make a fine husband. But it remained to be seen how good a provider he might become.

This active social life called for a good suit of clothes. In East Asia, as in most areas of the world, aviation is considered to be a high-status occupation. A pilot is expected to dress well for all but the most casual social occasions.

Bob was surprised to discover that keeping up appearances posed significant difficulties. Bob was large even for a westerner; bespoke suits were his only option. However, wartime disruption of trade networks had raised the price of most non-local goods, including suits tailored from imported fabric. Bob decided it would be cheaper to have the suits made in Kansas, and asked his family to have three Palm Beach suits, made of a warm-weather blend of cotton and mohair, tailored to his size and sent to Manila. That had been six months ago. To date, there was no sign of the suits, and having already sent a considerable sum back home, he did not want to deplete his meager savings by ordering suits in Manila. For the time being, Bob was forced to squeeze his large frame into a borrowed jacket when he needed to dress well, and hope that his suits would arrive on the next boat from America.

The suits were a minor annoyance, not a major issue, as Bob usually wore his khaki flying gear. Bob was in the air most days, often flying an eight-hour round trip from Manila to Hong Kong. This demanding schedule rapidly built up his flying hours. By the end of his first month at CALI he was wholly comfortable at the controls of a C-47, although, as he ruefully admitted to a fellow aviator, he still bounced on landing.

He would not bounce for long. Bob spent much of his initial earnings on fuel and runway fees, practicing landing and other maneuvers with borrowed aircraft. His goal was to qualify as a C-47 captain as soon as possible.

This was a sensible career ambition for a pilot working in the East Asia region. The C-47 is the military version of the DC-3, the twin-engine aircraft developed by the Douglas Aircraft com-

pany in the 1930s that revolutionized commercial air transport through significant advances in range and reliability. The rugged C-47 is the pickup truck of the skies: simple to maintain, able to fly in almost any condition and to land on (and take off from) the roughest airstrips. Often called a Dakota (the British military term for the aircraft), the C-47 was ideally suited to pioneer the new aviation opportunities in post-war East Asia.

But this dedication to pursuing professional qualifications was not solely for the purpose of boosting his career. Bob had bigger plans: he wanted to start his own charter air carrier. As pilot, Bob was fully aware of the value of his cargoes and the fees charged by the company. He saw the air-charter business for the gold mine it was and looked to profit from it himself.

The vibrant social life of a foreign pilot in Southeast Asia brought Bob into contact with numerous potential business partners and investors. By January 1947, Bob had set up a company with a fellow pilot (one of his housemates in Manila), a lawyer based in Singapore, and an investor from neighboring Malaya. The company, Southeastern Airlines, purchased an airplane from India and looked to start passenger services.

That would only be the start. Bob took me to Clarke Air Force Base, the huge American facility near Manila, to see the store of military aviation hardware: North American P-51 Mustangs, Republic P-47 Thunderbolts, Curtiss C-46 Commandos. I stood at one end of a row of parked Dakotas and could barely see the other end. Pointing at the line of aircraft, Bob said that a whole commercial fleet was ready to be purchased and put into service. I marveled at Bob's great dreams, and had little doubt that he had the ability and dedication to bring them into reality.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

JAKARTA

March 1991 – April 1992

During sixteen months in the near-constant company of Indonesians, Bob Freeberg came to share our contempt for our former colonial masters. To our great amusement, Bob once explained how English colloquial phrases often use the term “Dutch” to denote something that is false or counterfeit. For example, a Dutch Treat is when you are invited to dinner but must pay for your own meal; Dutch Courage is gin; and Double Dutch is gibberish. In turn, I described a Dutch Wife, the absorbent cylindrical bolster we Indonesians wrap our arms and legs around to keep comfortable during a sweltering tropical night.

However, there is one term, at least in relation to the case of RI-002, which denotes something wholly authentic: Dutch Denial. From the day of the first report that RI-002 had failed to arrive as scheduled in Bengkulu, the Dutch insisted that they had no involvement in (or even knowledge of) the fate of Bob Freeberg.

At the time, the Dutch colonial government had considered the disappearance of RI-002 to have been an accident; a plausible explanation given the fierce storms that can develop suddenly in the tropical highlands, especially during the afternoon when RI-002 had been flying. But Indonesian Air Force com-

mand, at least unofficially, had been skeptical of the Dutch explanation. Freeberg and his aircraft had been on Dutch radar (metaphorically if not literally) as he flew with impunity through what the Dutch considered to be their sovereign air space. Many believed that the Dutch authorities knew more about the disappearance than they would admit.

Perhaps those authorities knew the fate of the gold cargo. No trace had been found at the crash site. At the time of the disappearance, salacious rumors had abounded, fueled in no small part by defamatory comments from the colonial government and Dutch-language newspapers in Batavia. Many believed that Freeberg had somehow absconded with the gold and had ended his days (or might still be alive) in a comfortable, secluded retirement.

In 1991, I filed formal requests for information from the Dutch Embassy in Jakarta. My intention was to use my thorough command of the Dutch language to read between the lines of whatever documentation they gave me in the hopes of finding clues to this increasingly baffling mystery.

I also hoped that, through the passage of time, old wounds would have healed and the Dutch would be more likely to be forthcoming about the incident. Certainly, in the years after the transfer of sovereignty, our former colonial masters outdid themselves in attempts to correct past wrongs. A generation of Indonesian engineers, doctors, and other professionals owe their careers to "colonial-guilt" scholarships at leading universities in the Netherlands. Dutch corporations in joint ventures with local businesses have helped to bring the essentials of modern life to Indonesians throughout the archipelago. Young Dutch adventurers, using their advantage of a shared language with many older, educated Indonesians, established export-oriented enterprises in tourism, handicrafts, and other village-based industries, pumping significant amounts of money directly into the neediest sectors of society.

Some weeks after filing my request, I received a batch of official records relating to the post-war period, along with a cover letter from the military attaché at the embassy. At first glance, the documents supported the contention that RI-002 had crashed into a remote mountainside, where it lay undiscovered for decades. One document, a policy memo, stated that although the Dutch government had intended to grant the Republic some form of self-determination at a future date, at the time of the disappearance of RI-002 the colonial administration and military remained in control of air-space over Republican areas. They also claimed exclusive authority over the movement of people and goods into the Republic from other nations. If an aircraft flying to Republican territory did not land first at a Dutch airport for cargo and passenger inspection, or refused to follow the instructions of a Dutch military aircraft if intercepted over Republican-held territory, it would be considered to be a violation of sovereignty.

International convention permitted the use of any measures to address such a violation, including deadly force. If a Dutch patrol had intercepted RI-002 and shot it down, the incident would have been noted in flight logs as a legitimate military action against a foreign intruder. I was not surprised to learn from these documents that RI-002 had been singled out with a standing order to intercept under any circumstances, even if encountered flying between Republican destinations.

The documents provided no answers—or even important new information. They offered no reason for the strange absence of flight logs or the other anomalies. The cover letter only reiterated the official position that there was no record of interference of RI-002 by Dutch aircraft. The letter ended with the note that RI-002 was an “illegal aircraft flying arms, valuable cargoes, and contraband in the service of insurgents”.

Despite decades of reconciliation and cooperation, that letter might have been written in 1948, not 1991. I saw little reason to make further inquiries to officialdom in the Netherlands. With Dutch Denial forming an impenetrable barrier, I would have to seek out the truth through other means.

Having obtained little information of value from Indonesian documents, and what I suspected to be outright disinformation from military officials in the Netherlands, I turned to the next logical source, the Americans. I knew from my days in the diplomatic service that the American government was not likely to be concerned about the activities of a law-abiding (at least in non-Dutch eyes) private citizen in foreign territory. However, the Dutch had been very concerned about Bob, and vocal in their condemnation of his activities. This might have made Bob a “person of interest” to American diplomats, who then might have observed his movements and kept records that I could access.

I began the process of searching the American official archives in 1992 with a visit to the offices of the United States Information Service in the American Embassy in Jakarta. To my surprise and delight, Pamela Hyde Smith, the press attaché, shared my enthusiasm for investigating the mystery of RI-002. Pamela and her staff would devote considerable time and effort to navigating the labyrinth of official archives on my behalf.

The first documents they requested were the most obvious: Bob's naval service record. These were considered to be public information, and I soon received copies of the documents in the mail.

This was dry reading, no more than lists of events and dates. Yet they evoked in me strong emotions. Bob had spoken little of his war experiences. His few anecdotes emphasized the difficulty of the mission while depreciating his own contribution. However, I knew from conversations with his colleagues in the Aviation Brotherhood that during his brief career as a

navy pilot Bob Freeberg had been renowned for courage, calmness under pressure, and incredible skill. Decades after our acquaintance, I would finally learn of his exceptional high regard in the eyes of his government.

The records stated that Bobby Earl Freeberg (Bobby, not Robert, was his legal name) was born in McCune, Kansas (a town near his boyhood home of Parsons) on 23 February 1921. In 1942, Bob enlisted as a naval cadet, spending two years in pilot training and college at Fort Scott, Kansas. He graduated at the top of his class, was commissioned in March 1944 and sent to the Pacific Theater.

Bob served most of his wartime tour with Bulldog Squadron, a Liberator search-and-patrol unit based on various islands near New Guinea. He spent most of his tour scouring the hidden bays of remote islands for Japanese ships as the squadron island-hopped in advance of General MacArthur. His unit was reported to have inflicted more damage to enemy ships, aircraft, and ground installations than any other Liberator unit in the region. Bulldog was credited with sinking 44 vessels and barges, and destroying 17 aircraft on the ground.

Bob himself was at the controls for the squadron's biggest kill, a 10.000 ton tanker caught in a bay in northern Borneo. The bomb sight was not functioning correctly, so the Liberator flew in at masthead height, scoring two direct hits.

After the Japanese surrendered, Bob was sent to Australia to assist in the decommissioning of allied air bases. Afterward, he was assigned to the Philippines, where the Navy put his extraordinary aviation skills to full advantage as a test pilot. In one incident, he managed to land his PB4Y2 Privateer on a flat tire, expertly playing with the engine power settings to keep the weight off the useless tire until the final few meters. Bob was finally discharged in May 1946 with the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade and with numerous commendations for skill and bravery.



Flight Lieutenant Bobby Earl
Freeberg on his graduation
from flight school in 1944.

A second package of documents contained an unclassified diplomatic dispatch written in August 1978 from the American Embassy in Jakarta to the State Department in Washington, DC. The cable referred to a report written by Indonesian authorities regarding the remains found at the RI-002 crash site in Sumatra. In this report, the Indonesians advised their American counterparts that the crash victims had not been separately identifiable, and that all of the bone fragments found in the wreckage had been buried in Tanjung Karang.

However, a follow-up cable states that the Freeberg family was contacted about repatriation of Bob's remains. Someone in the family (the name has been excised for, I assume, reasons of privacy) replied that they would prefer that Bob remained buried in Tanjung Karang.

If he was there at all, that is. Indonesian Air Force documents explicitly state that remains recovered from the crash site had been stored in six coffins, "one larger than the others" according to an observer. The demands of military protocol and the sensitivity of Indonesians regarding veterans of the struggle for independence would, rightly or wrongly, have prevented a foreigner from being interred in such hallowed ground as a heroes cemetery. No grave-stone purports to mark the final resting place of Bob Freeberg, and no document offers a clue to the fate of the "sixth coffin".

II

NON STOP TO JOGJA

JOGJAKARTA — JAVA

September 1947

In early September we found a buyer for the quinine and vanilla, who took possession and promised payment in 30 days. With the cargo sold, we were finally free to return to Java, which we did on 21 September 1947.

The return flight of RI-002 to Jogjakarta was packed with medicines and other necessities. The most important, in my opinion, were the boxes of radio equipment that would facilitate communication between Jogjakarta and other Republican regions, as well as the outside world.

We also carried a passenger: Captain Ignacio Espina of the Intelligence Section of the Philippines Army. Pang and I had arranged for this veteran of the guerrilla resistance to the Japanese occupation of his country to live in Jogjakarta for an indefinite period, where he would train our freedom fighters in guerrilla warfare. We were gratified that both the Indonesian and Philippine governments had approved this arrangement, the first direct aid the Republic would receive from another sovereign nation.

Though historic, this mission was also strictly secret, which posed a significant logistical challenge. Espina's superiors would not allow us to make the customary refueling stopover in Labuan,

an island off the east coast of Borneo which, like Singapore, was then under British control. Bob decided to attempt a non-stop flight to Jogjakarta by installing an extra fuel tank and topping up our fuel at Sanga-Sanga in the Sulu archipelago, the southernmost airstrip in the Philippines. From friends at Clarke Air Base he secured a wing tank of a decommissioned C-46 Commando in the process of being stripped for parts. We stored this in the passenger cabin like an ordinary item of cargo, but with valves and piping connecting it to the Dakota's fuel system. Espinas commander arranged clearance for an overnight stop at Sanga-Sanga.

We left Sanga-Sanga shortly after noon. On this schedule, we would approach the north coast of Java shortly before sunset. We hoped that in the waning light, we would be a scarcely discernable speck amid the riotous colors of a tropical twilight. But in the tropics, dark night falls within minutes of sundown. We would be flying blind on our last leg, so Bob was relying on my familiarity with the terrain to find Maguwo in the fading light.

Flying over the island of Borneo for the first time in daylight, I felt a twinge of anxiety. The forest canopy stretched, an unbroken green carpet, from horizon to horizon. Were we to fall into the sea, at least an oil slick might mark our graves. But if we were to plunge into this forest, it would swallow us whole, perhaps for eternity.

I knew this land to be as valuable as it was beautiful. Untold oil wealth, just beginning to be tapped before the war, could be extracted and exported to fund the building of our new nation. The Dutch would spare no effort to maintain their hold on this great natural treasure. It was our task to ensure that the riches of Borneo and the other islands would be used for the benefit of Indonesians, not siphoned off to Europe.

I was yanked from my reverie when the engines suddenly started to cough, and the aircraft lurched as we lost power. My vague fears of crashing into the forest were suddenly very real. We

had been running on the fuel stored in the extra tank in the cabin, sensibly draining those hundreds of gallons of highly volatile aviation gasoline sloshing around the rusty tank as early in the flight as possible. Bob switched over to the Dakota's regular fuel system and the engines resumed their reassuring drone. But the look of surprise and concern on Bob's face told me that the tank had emptied sooner than he had estimated, perhaps because of a headwind. With no landmarks visible we could only plot our current position to within a few hundred kilometers, and hope that the fuel in the main tanks would be sufficient to reach our destination.

I turned back to the window and the featureless landscape below, and thought about the reasons my colleagues and I were taking such risks. Boedi, Pang, and I had joined the military to fight for the freedom of all Indonesians. If that goal required us to sacrifice our lives, so be it. Espina was on board because he was a professional soldier following orders.

That left our captain. If his motives were wholly mercenary, during the week when the quinine was unsold he would have simply left us stranded in Manila and flown off to find more profitable charters. That he had not abandoned us spoke to his character and his vision. As the first foreign pilot to throw in his lot with Indonesia, Bob could expect a lucrative future as an aviation-services contractor with contacts at the highest levels of an independent Indonesia.

But I had met enough members of the Aviation Brotherhood during these past months to know that many were motivated by the thrill of danger. If Bob was flying back to Java in search of adventure, we might be betting the fate of our nation on a hired gun who, at any time, might fly off in search of new thrills. I regarded the unbroken rain forest canopy far below us, now blazing emerald in the westering sun, and brooded on the future, a future that depended on aviators like Bob Freeberg.

The Netherlands East Indies had already played a significant role in aviation history. The colonial army had maintained an air corps since 1915, and before the war the Amsterdam-Batavia route operated by Dutch national carrier KLM had been the longest commercial service in the world. In 1934, when I was in my third year of junior high school in Madiun, the Netherlands East Indies leaped to global attention when Batavia was chosen as a staging point in the London-to-Melbourne race; the first aviation rally to span half the globe. Like a boy of a later generation who would amass an encyclopedic knowledge of the effort to land a man on the moon, I tracked the daily progress of the race and memorized every scrap of information about the participants and machines. My father berated me for wasting time and effort learning this “useless knowledge”, so I restricted my studies to when I was alone in my room.

However, this “useless knowledge” paid off when I stood for my final exam in junior high school. I had been ill for an entire month that semester, returning to class only three weeks before the examination. Everyone, including my father, expected me to flunk out. I was saved by one exercise in the geography section: map out a journey from Amsterdam to Batavia. While my classmates mapped the sea journey, I concocted a flight itinerary based on the London-to-Melbourne route: something even the examination committee had not expected. With all those airfield names fresh in my memory, I just jotted them down in reverse sequence, earning a perfect score in geography and raising my overall grade to just over the pass mark.

As we crossed the Java Sea and approached the north coast of the island of Java, I would again put this knowledge to use. Now, however, the stakes were much higher: our lives, not school grades, were on the line. With the fuel level dangerously low, it was up to me to get us to Jogjakarta by the shortest possible route.

The sun had set more than an hour before. I could barely discern the outlines of Mount Muria on the coast to our right. But I saw no indication of Mount Merapi, the active volcano that stands over Jogjakarta which I had hoped would guide us straight to Maguwo. I told Bob to head directly south, hoping that Merapi might somehow appear in the gloom.

We were at about eight thousand feet, flying almost blind, when I saw dim lights in the distance directly ahead of us. I guessed from the grid-like pattern of lights that I was looking at a town large enough to have electric lighting. If we were on the correct course, the town would be Klaten, thirty kilometers northeast of Jogjakarta. But in the darkness, with no other landmarks visible, I could not be sure.

Bob was visibly impatient. Nevertheless, I kept my silence, wanting to make a positive identification of the landmark. But Bob could wait no longer.

“Come on, Muharto,” he snapped. “It's your country. You should know where we are!”

I peered at the landscape below, visible only as vague outlines in the wan light of the crescent moon. I saw silhouettes of a line of uniform rounded mounds. I had never flown over the area, but the formation looked familiar. Then I remembered a plate in the Dutch *Bos* atlas we used in primary school, which had a drawing of similar hills rising from the limestone coastal plateau south of Jogjakarta. In the atlas they were called the *Duizend Gebergte*, Thousand Mountains. My classmates (at least the boys and always with a snigger) referred to the formation by the local idiom that precisely describes the shape of the hills: *Susu Seribu*, A Thousand Breasts.

With full confidence, I told Bob:

“Turn west and watch the hills below. As soon as you reach the end, turn due north.”

Bob followed my directions, and minutes later we saw the lights of Jogjakarta. But as we flew over the sultan's palace the entire city blacked out. This was understandable: we had arrived completely unannounced. We learned later that we had set off two air-raid sirens.

A half-dozen torch lights beamed upward from various points in the city. These were fifth-column members signaling what they believed to be a Dutch fighter or bomber. In the close quarters of Jogjakarta's neighborhoods, this was perilous indeed. One brief flash of light spotted by a neighbor would bring the entire community to the traitor's door, with terrible consequences.

I pointed in the presumed direction of Maguwo airstrip while Bobby dropped his landing gear and played with the propeller pitch controls to produce the undulating "friendly aircraft" sound signature. After tense moments, the airport lights blazed on, and Bobby landed with only a few liters of fuel left in the tank.

"Never again," said our captain, as he powered down the twin engines of his Dakota.

AN ESSENTIAL LIFELINE

JOGJAKARTA — BANGKOK

September — October 1947

“My name's Bob Freeberg. I'm an American. I'm a pilot and I sympathize with your struggle. How can I help?”

This is how President Soekarno remembered the first words spoken to him by Bob Freeberg. In an interview with American journalist Cindy Adams, Soekarno told of the day Bob had suddenly appeared in his office at the presidential palace in Jogjakarta. Though the interview took place almost two decades afterward, Soekarno still spoke fondly of the “dear boy” who had “appeared out of nowhere” but would go on to play such an important role in the nation’s struggle for freedom.

Soekarno's outstanding rhetorical gifts included a propensity to embellish stories, so most of his personal reminiscences should be taken with a grain of salt. I have a different recollection of the encounter. The day after our arrival in Jogjakarta, we had a lengthy meeting with Suryadarma, then I took Bob on a walking tour of Jogjakarta.

When we passed the imposing colonial edifice which served as Soekarno's residence and the *de facto* presidential palace, I suggested we look inside.

“Sure,” Bob said, in obvious jest. “Let's say hi to President Soekarno.”

I was acquainted with a few palace staff members from my days as army liaison officer. Some name dropping at the gate, along with my officer's uniform and a foreigner in tow, gained us entry. Protocol was the least of our concerns during those difficult days, and few foreigners visited Jogjakarta. A staffer of my acquaintance spotted us in the lobby, and, of course, wanted to know more about my companion. When I explained Bob's role as a blockade runner, the staffer immediately offered to escort us directly to Soekarno's office.

Born and raised in rural Kansas, Bob was understandably nonplussed when his joking comment about meeting Soekarno suddenly became reality. I remember that he simply mumbled his name, looking uncomfortable, as he shook Soekarno's hand. Fortunately, in private conversation Soekarno treated everyone as an equal, regardless of position or background. Soekarno invited us to sit, and then asked Bob some personal questions: his age and marital status. Americans regard these subjects as private matters not to be shared with strangers, but we believe that they are suitable conversation openers. To be sure, Soekarno also questioned Bob about his aviation qualifications and experience, and was quite satisfied with the replies.

Soekarno expressed his fervent hope that Bob would be able to maintain an essential line of communication between our struggling republic and the outside world. If the Dutch were to succeed in isolating us behind their blockade, he said, our former colonial masters might yet strangle our new nation at birth.

Bob would do exactly that. For the next year, Bob and RI-002 served as a lifeline for the Republic. Because RI-002 was considered an official Indonesian Air Force asset (albeit a rental), I accompanied each flight as the mission leader, usually taking the right-hand seat in the cockpit as the (thoroughly unqualified) co-pilot. Nevertheless, my position was of nominal authority only: Captain Freeberg always had the final say.

Most of this work was simple freighting; performing the mundane functions normally the domain of commercial shippers. Many flights were wholly internal, shifting personnel and material from one Republican enclave to another. On our international flights, RI-002 would fly just about every conceivable cargo. Spare machinery parts, automobile tires, radio equipment, mail, books, and medicines were usual imports, while on outbound flights Bob carried high-value plantation produce such as our original cargo of quinine and vanilla, rubber and spices, along with gem stones and other valuables to be sold, in open markets or through shady backroom deals, in Manila, Singapore, or Bangkok.

Some missions, however, were wholly military by design. On 17 October 1947, RI-002 flew ten paratroopers into the rain forest at the southern end of the island of Borneo. The governor of the region was beleaguered by pro-Dutch insurgents, evidently trained guerrilla fighters, who would raid settlements, then disappear without a trace into the dense rain forests. We hoped that our own commandos would beat them at their own game.

I watched the paratroopers being trained in the week before the mission. I did not envy them. For most, if not all, this would be their first time in an airplane. Yet, they were expected to jump out of it and land in the midst of a remote forest. Their training would last only a few days; barely sufficient to learn to pack their parachutes and to land without breaking their legs.

Nevertheless, all were in high spirits as they boarded RI-002. But as the Dakota approached the drop zone, one trooper suffered a last-minute failure of nerve. He intentionally pulled the rip cord on his parachute while still in the airplane, rendering him unable to jump. I do not know what fate awaited him back at base for his cowardice, but it could not have been worse than that of his nine comrades-in-arms. After only a month of operations all would be tracked down and either killed or captured by

Dutch forces. But the mission is still remembered as the Indonesian army's first modern-style commando infiltration, commemorated by a full-scale replica RI-002 in a park on the outskirts of Pangkalan Bun, Central Kalimantan.

A few days afterward, Bob made a similar paratrooper drop over Madura, a large island lying east of Surabaya. On this occasion, we dropped only two men, but also several bundles, including bales of rice, money, and sten guns. Bob would soon be defamed as a gunrunner, but in this case he failed at that task: the parachute on the bundle containing the arms and ammunition failed to open and the guns were smashed to pieces on impact. But the food and money was put to great use and helped to keep Republican sentiment alive among the fierce Madurese.

Our flight back out of Indonesia after our return from Manila might well have been our last. In late October Suryadarma ordered Bob to fly two of our senior aviators, Halim Perdanakusuma and Iswahyudi, to Bangkok. Both pilots were graduates of the Dutch colonial military academy. Halim had been training with the Royal Canadian Air Force in Britain when the Japanese invaded the Netherlands East Indies. Consequently, he was inducted into the European war, flying 44 missions with the allies. Iswahyudi had been evacuated to Australia along with other colonial military officers, making his own way back (reportedly in a rubber raft!) immediately after the war ended.

Suryadarma had ordered them to purchase and fly back the second fully serviceable aircraft in our fleet: RI-003. An Australian pilot had offered to sell his Avro-Anson two-engine aircraft to the Republic at a favorable price: fifteen kilograms of gold. This was yet another example of the support given by our neighbors to the south. Muhammad Hatta had easily raised the required amount from donors in Sumatra. Halim and Iswahyudi would deliver the gold, take possession of the Avro-Anson, and fly it to Bukittinggi.



Paratroopers boarding
RI-002 for the first military
infiltration action into Dutch-
controlled Kalimantan in
October 1947.

On our arrival in Bangkok we were detained by authorities unsure of the “RI” registration. The Dutch Legation to Siam (Thailand briefly reverted to the old name of their nation following the war) pressured the government to confiscate RI-002 as an illegal blockade runner. But the Siamese, who had neither been colonized by Europeans nor formally occupied by the Japanese, seldom entertained the demands of a foreign power if their own interests were not affected. The Siamese authorities placed Bob in comfortable detention in a business hotel while they considered their options. The Indonesian crew, on the other hand, were left to our own devices, and had to find our own accommodation in the less-salubrious quarters of that rowdy town.

A few days later, to the dismay of the Dutch, the Siamese declared the Dakota to be legally registered with a legitimate aviation organization—a significant symbolic victory for the Republic of Indonesia. Bob was released to go about his business, in the process attracting considerable attention from the local press. One lengthy profile appeared under the catchy headline: “Indonesia’s One Man Air Force”.

In a sense, this romantic epithet was correct. The Republic of Indonesia was at war. Any action that benefited the Republic, from attacking Dutch outposts to growing crops to feed Jogjakarta’s booming population of refugees, was explicitly hostile to Dutch interests. Every flight of RI-002 was an act of war that strengthened the Republic and weakened the Dutch. Without ever firing a weapon, Bob Freeberg had become one of the most effective assets of the Republican military arsenal.

While he was never reckless, the demands of the job, and the need to keep our distance from possible Dutch patrols, meant that Bob would take calculated risks, particularly during flights carrying only cargo. On one such occasion, with only Bob, Boedi, and myself on board, our flight path was blocked by towering thun-

derclouds. I suggested we take a roundabout route that would add at least an hour to the flight time. Bob rejected that idea, as it would drop fuel reserves to a dangerous minimum. He asked me to indicate the positions of nearby mountains.

My charts, and my knowledge of Java's geography, indicated that the only route where we did not risk a "controlled flight into terrain" ran directly through the black thunderheads. It was now my turn to object, insisting that the possibility of running out of fuel before reaching Jogjakarta posed a lesser risk than flying through a violent tropical storm. Bob ignored the increasingly strident protests of his "copilot" and pointed the Dakota directly into the maelstrom.

Moments later we were engulfed in a dark gray blanket of cloud, and were dazzled by flashes of lightning. The Dakota shuddered and creaked in the turbulence, with sickening plunges followed by painfully slow climbs to regain lost altitude. I was terrified, but Bob looked no different than he did when cruising through clear skies, though his eyes flicked constantly over the flight instruments and he kept an unusually firm grip on the controls. Seeing I was in distress, Bob shouted:

"Don't fret, Muharto. This is nothing. After the war I used to run test flights into typhoons!"

BOB THE BEST

JOGJAKARTA — MANILA

October 1947

“Bring back some *buntil!*” Bob shouted from the open cockpit window to Boedi, who had jumped from the Dakota as soon as Bob had powered down. Boedi was running to catch the train into Jogjakarta and then a bus to his home village near the town of Magelang, where he would take a short leave. Bob was referring to a steamed delicacy prepared from ground fish and vegetables wrapped in papaya leaves. Boedi's mother made a delicious buntil, which Bob would devour, fiery *sambal* and all.

This was typical of our American captain. Bob demanded no special treatment from his hosts, for whom every waking moment was an exhausting struggle to survive. On many missions we would have to spend a night on an isolated airstrip, with no accommodation available. On these occasions, Captain Freeberg forswore even trivial creature comforts, curling up on the wing with a tattered blanket so his crew might make themselves marginally more comfortable in the cabin.

When in Jogjakarta, Bob stayed in the room we provided for him in the Hotel Merdeka. Built in 1911 to accommodate guests of the Dutch military, the Grand Hotel De Djokdja was renovated and expanded over the decades, by the late 1930s taking pride of

place as the premiere hotel in Jogjakarta and the center of colonial society. During the three-year Japanese occupation, the hotel was renamed the Hotel Asahi and used as military headquarters. In 1946, when the Republican government relocated to Jogjakarta, the hotel was re-named the Hotel Merdeka, and many rooms were used as makeshift offices by senior government officials.

Despite the illustrious history and opulent furnishings, conditions inside the Hotel Merdeka were not a great improvement over those in isolated airstrips. The wartime occupation and post-war blockade had taken a toll. Paint was peeling, sheets were threadbare, and the once-fine kitchen could serve only simple dishes of rice, *tempe* (a type of fried soybean cake), and *sambal*, the fiery sauce of chilies, garlic, and onion that accompanies all Indonesian dishes.

The Hotel Merdeka was the preferred accommodation for the few foreigners who visited Jogjakarta. Bob was soon joined by the representatives of the United Nations Committee of Good Offices (GOC), whose task was to investigate conditions in the Republic. With Suryadarma's tacit consent, Bob flew the GOC officers on a tour of Republican-controlled areas. Thanks to Bob, the officials could witness for themselves our success in building a functioning society with minimal resources and in the most difficult of circumstances.

Bob told me that the officials had been profoundly impressed by the passion and commitment of the common Indonesians they encountered in their journey. However, Bob himself was not impressed by the behavior of the officials when they returned to Jogjakarta. Bob had often complained to me about the American diplomats in Manila. Before we introduced him to Senator Pendatun, Bob had experienced great difficulty bringing his dispute with Bob Walters before the courts. He felt that the staff at the American embassy should have assisted him in deal-

ing with this foreign legal system, but had been too concerned with their social standing and the perks of diplomatic life to focus on assisting their compatriots.

Bob regarded the GOC officials in the same light. I thought this unfair. By all accounts the commission representatives were conscientious and observant. However, one incident did suggest that Bob might have a point.

One evening, I invited Bob to join me for dinner at a food stall near the Hotel Merdeka. The owner had just received a shipment of salted duck eggs from his home village. This would be a memorable treat for the residents of blockaded Jogjakarta, who regarded ourselves as fortunate if able to eat one chicken egg a week. We arrived at the stall to see a dozen people crowding around, watching patiently while the stall owner carefully sliced each egg into many pieces, giving a single sliver to each diner to be savored with their meal of rice, soy cake, and chili.

Afterward, Bob invited me back to the hotel for coffee. The few guests in the dining room were eating meals no more elaborate than those served in the food stall we had just left. We were halfway through our coffee when the GOC officials arrived. We watched the waiters bring out steaming plates of corned beef, potatoes, and other items the officials had brought with them. The other diners, which included senior government officials, regarded them briefly, then turned back to their own Spartan meals. One of the officials spotted Bob and nodded in recognition. Bob nodded back, then turned to me, his face set in an expression of open disapproval.

I think Bob might have been somewhat unfair in his harsh judgment of the GOC officers. I later learned that the American delegate had openly praised the courage, resourcefulness, and resilience of the Indonesians he encountered during his expeditions and in Jogjakarta itself. On the other hand, Bob never once ventured any opinions about our revolution, though the many

financial and other sacrifices he made without complaint during sixteen months of flying for the Republic spoke volumes. However, he did voice his feelings in copious correspondence with his family in Kansas. During spare moments, often in the cockpit of RI-002 during layovers, Bob would draft long letters to his parents and siblings. I must confess that on one occasion, curiosity got the better of me when I spotted a letter lying face up on the RI-002 radio console as I searched for the log book. Assuming that Bob would not leave a letter containing intensely personal content lying around, I stole a sideways glance and read:

“...the Dutch are saying one thing and doing another. They are still trying to keep the Indonesian people conquered but I think it impossible for the Dutch to ever again do that. The people are all very strongly united against the Dutch and everywhere you go people shout their slogan of “Merdeka!” The people are poor and haven’t proper clothing, transportation or weapons to wage a war, but they will stand to the last man against the Dutch. It is pretty wonderful to see a people believe in the freedom we Americans enjoy and are ready to fight for the achievement of this view. I for one believe that the Dutch should be stopped, because they are still using the policies of oppression toward the people of Indonesia. Apparently they had forgotten how bitterly they hated being the subjects of Nazis...”

Bob’s innate reluctance to openly praise our revolution was mirrored in our own conduct. In those times of dire struggle, no one expressed gratitude for another person’s efforts in the fight for freedom, no matter how arduous or even heroic. It was our way of acknowledging that everyone was expected to contribute whatever was necessary without thought of reward or recognition. Thus, no one (except Soekarno) openly thanked Bob for his contribution. However, we were often able to demonstrate our gratitude in other ways.



Sudjana Kerton's
impression of the Ngasem
market in Jogjakarta
during the blockade.

Shortly after the GOC officials had left Jogjakarta, I met Bob at the Hotel Merdeka for dinner. As usual, the dining room was filled with senior civilian and military officials. They were curious about the American who was making such a valuable contribution to our struggle, and all eyes followed Bob as he entered the dining room.

We sat at an empty table and I signaled to a waiter, who I knew to be the senior staff member of the dining room, to bring us both the same meal as the other diners, on the assumption that food fit for a government minister or army general would be good enough for a junior officer and a cargo-airplane pilot. A few minutes afterward another waiter appeared, carrying a single plate of rice and soy cake, which he set in front of me. Bob and I regarded each other with bemusement, wondering why the waiter did not bring two plates at once. Then, the senior waiter, his dignity undiminished by his stained and frayed waistcoat, approached our table carrying a gleaming silver-service tray. With a graceful flourish, the waiter set the tray on the table in front of Bob and whipped off the cover, revealing steaming slices of freshly fried corned beef, the contents of the single can left behind by the GOC officials.

Bob was mortified, and motioned for the waiter to take the plate away and distribute the corned beef to other diners. But the waiter would not hear of it. He mildly berated Bob in Javanese, in the tone of an affectionate parent to a child refusing a meal. Bob looked to me for a translation. I smiled and said:

“You need to keep up your strength to fly that big airplane. We are all counting on you.”

At the end of October, initial missions completed, Bob returned to Manila. His passengers on this flight were several Republican officials tasked with preparing for participation in our first international conference.

The United Nations Security Council had taken note of the positive impressions gathered by the GOC officials Bob had flown

around Republican regions. The officials had informally commented that the areas under our control were peaceful and secure, though we struggled to acquire even the basic necessities of survival.

The Security Council therefore decided to hear our side of the story directly by inviting a delegation of Republican officials and academics to a conference scheduled for the first two weeks of December in Baguio, a pleasant town in the highlands north of Manila. The conference was conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), which had been established in early 1947 to foster economic cooperation among the new nations of East Asia. The Security Council decided that the commission members would be in the best position to evaluate our claims that the Republic of Indonesia was (or had the potential to become) a viable political and economic entity.

This would be our best and perhaps only opportunity to show the world that the Republic of Indonesia, if given the opportunity, commanded the physical and social resources required to build and maintain a just and prosperous sovereign state. And we could not have availed ourselves of that opportunity without the invaluable assistance of Bob Freeberg.

MUSEUM OF MEMORIES

JOGJAKARTA

April 1993

Jogjakarta holds a special place in my heart. Each visit to this historic town in the heartland of Java rekindles memories of my days as a dashing blockade runner and, of course, of meeting and marrying my beloved wife, Ani.

In 1993, I had a special reason to hop on the Jogja-bound train. An article in *Angkasa*, the internal magazine of the Indonesian Air Force, reported that an abandoned sugar-cane processing factory, now part of the expanded Adisucipto air base, had been converted into a military aviation museum. The article further stated that all memorabilia and relics relating to Indonesian military aviation history had been relocated to the new facility for permanent storage. There I might find the remaining physical evidence of RI-002.

These historic artifacts had found a suitable home. Jogjakarta is the living symbol of our struggle for self-determination. The modern town was founded in 1756 on the site of an ancient imperial capital as a protest against Dutch interference in Javanese politics by Mangkubumi, a charismatic uncle of the weak and indecisive ruler of the Mataram kingdom, which encompassed much of the heartland of Java. Mangkubumi believed that his nephew had become little more than a puppet of the Dutch,

who then controlled the VOC trading ports of Java's north coast. Mangkubumi led his fellow disaffected nobles in a series of rebellions that humiliated the feckless young monarch. To restore peace to the region, the Dutch suggested the division of Mataram into two kingdoms: one ruled by the existing monarch, the other by Mangkubumi, now Sultan Hamengkubuono, from a new palace in a town he named Jogjakarta.

For the next one hundred and fifty years, Jogjakarta maintained a fierce spirit of independence, even as the Dutch exerted increasing control over practical affairs, relegating the sultan to figurehead status. That all changed in 1939, when the designated heir to the throne, Dorojatun, returned from his university studies in the Netherlands to succeed his deceased father. When the Japanese occupied the town three years later, the people of Jogjakarta looked to the revered ninth Hamengkubuono for leadership and resilience.

After the Japanese occupation forces left the city to await repatriation in August 1945, the sultan took control. Six months later, the sultan invited the Republican government to relocate to Jogjakarta, a bold measure that secured the visionary, Dutch-educated sultan an exalted position in the pantheon of Indonesian national heroes. President Soekarno and his ministers set up offices in the imposing neoclassical public buildings vacated by the Dutch, though that grandeur was not reflected in the near-rags they wore and simple meals of rice and soy cake they ate.

Sultan Hamengkubuono IX frequently emerged from his palace, dressed for action in military fatigues, to give impromptu street-corner speeches calling on his subjects to support the Republican government in any way possible. As thousands of young Republicans from Java and other islands sought refuge in the new capital, the sultan opened the gates of his royal fortress, setting aside large areas for use as a university, the first step in developing the corps of managers and technicians the new nation would require to survive and grow.

A half-century on, Jogjakarta remains defined by this focus on education. The tranquil environment, inexpensive cost of living, and general atmosphere of intellectual freedom attracts students from throughout the archipelago, the region, and the world.

Nevertheless Jogjakarta remains, in many respects, a traditional heartland Javanese community. In neighborhoods redolent with the fragrance of the melted wax used for making *batik*, the Jogjanese practice age-old forms of ritual and ceremony little changed from the days when their sultan held real power of life and death over his subjects.

Many of these customs reflect the mysticism that pervades Java. We consider the unseen world of spirits and uncanny forces to be as real as the ground beneath our feet. In recent years I have become fascinated by these spiritual practices, and their applications in the physical world. Though my wife makes no secret of her disapproval of this “waste of time”, I use every visit to Jogjakarta as an opportunity to confer with one or more masters of Javanese mysticism.

The Jogjanese believe that Mount Merapi, the active volcano towering over the city to the north, is a gateway to the spirit world. On this occasion, I awoke well before dawn and drove along a battered mountain road to a village high on the slopes to confer with the gatekeeper of the holy mountain. This venerated palace servant led me on a strenuous climb to a shrine above his village, where we meditated as the mountain vented steam into the sky over our heads. I then drove back to Jogjakarta, presenting myself at the guard post of Adisucipto air base shortly before noon.

This was my first visit to the airfield after resigning my commission thirty-five years before. I signed in, giving my full name and rank, then walked along tranquil, tree-shaded avenues, the silence occasionally broken by the drone of turboprop training

craft. I passed the trim bungalows lining the street, identifying the location of the office where, a half-century in the past, I had piloted a desk and dreamed of gaining my wings.

Eventually, my wandering ended at the museum. The facility is primarily an educational tool; I was engulfed by throngs of elementary school children as I toured the exhibits: uniforms, flight instruments, and other memorabilia opening the floodgates of memory.

The most vivid memory was evoked by a replica of the fastest and most agile of our hand-me-down fleet, the Nishikoren two-seater monoplane that ferried Bob and me from Tasikmalaya to Jogjakarta on that brilliant June morning. I climbed onto the wing, looked down into the open passenger cockpit and remembered Bob and me squeezed into a space barely large enough for a short, slight Japanese airman.

I also remembered fretting that only the pilot wore a parachute. Each flight in one of our refurbished Japanese aircraft carried a high risk of dropping out of the sky because of the sudden failure of a component previously certified airworthy. Our skilled, dedicated mechanics relied only on visual inspection and educated guesswork even when inspecting such critical components as fuel pumps. The technical logs, the “story” of the aircraft, which list the maintenance history of each component, were all written in Japanese!

The inherent unreliability of the Japanese aircraft encouraged two Air Force officers to strive for excellence. Wiweko Sopono, who would later build flagship carrier Garuda Indonesia into a world-class commercial airline, and Nurtanio Pringgoadi-surjo, who founded Indonesia's first aircraft manufacturer, built serviceable light aircraft almost from scratch.

The Dutch blockade had eliminated any possibility of importing manufactured aviation components. Instead, they cannibalized parts of the Japanese wrecks and whatever else they could scrounge, including carving and polishing wooden propellers by hand.

Their crowning effort, exhibited to bemused visitors in the museum, was a strange fusion of hang glider and motorcycle intended for use as an observation aircraft. But this ungainly "micro-light" actually flew, marking the high point of our "home industry".

While the aviation museum claimed to represent a comprehensive history of the Air Force, I could find no indication of RI-002, save the distant outline of Bob's Dakota in the diorama depicting commandos parachuting into a Borneo rain forest. So I left the public area and found the office of the curator, where I identified myself as former copilot of RI-002 and asked about the artifacts recovered from the crash site. The curator had some slight knowledge of the story of RI-002, but was unsure as to whether any artifacts from the wreckage had made their way into the museum. He invited me to join him for lunch in the canteen while staff members searched the storage rooms.

We returned to his office an hour afterward to find a small cardboard box on the coffee table. The curator opened the box, which contained some photographs, two rusted hand guns, and a dynamo. I looked first at the photographs, which showed the wreckage strewn around the crash site, and a wing with the barely legible "RI" markings. One photograph was of men sitting in an open-sided field tent. I assumed that the tall, mustached figure standing among them was Flight Lieutenant Sulaeman, who had led the expedition but had inexplicably refused to answer my letters of inquiry.

I then picked up the dynamo, which I assumed to have been a spare, since it was in pristine condition. My heart skipped as, for the first time, I touched a direct physical link with the mystery of RI-002. This may well have been the second time I had handled this particular item. Bob had insisted that I help him perform routine maintenance work. This farm boy believed that a pilot, like a soldier with his rifle, should be thoroughly familiar with the equipment on which his life depended.

As described by Sulaeman in his report, a 7.62 caliber bullet was embedded in the winding. I peered closer, and realized that the bullet was, in fact, not embedded, but only wedged between the rotor and the rectifier. But the Bakelite wafer was not shattered or even cracked, while the wires on the winding showed no evidence of having absorbed the energy of a speeding bullet. The bullet itself showed none of the deformation one would expect from punching through a metal fuselage. It was as though the bullet had been placed there by hand.

I stared at the dynamo in my hand, puzzling over the anomaly, and what it might mean. Then the curators' office seemed to fade and I felt myself, somehow, in the crew cabin of RI-002. However, I was not in the copilot seat, which I seldom left during a flight, but near the radio cubicle just forward of the passenger cabin, where the spare dynamo would have been stowed. Suddenly, the aircraft made a sickening plunge, and I heard excited voices from the passenger cabin. The aircraft lurched, and the engines, at full power, screamed in protest. I had never experienced such violent maneuvers during my hundreds of hours in Bob's Dakota. The aircraft shuddered again, screams now coming from both fore and aft, and the deck tilted to a sickening angle as the Dakota went into a full-power stall. I heard a loud crash as the fuselage disintegrated around me, and I was again sitting on the couch in the museum, the curator regarding me with a quizzical expression.

Profoundly shaken by the experience, I returned the dynamo to the box and stood up. Pleading a prior commitment, I thanked the curator for his time and walked out of his office and the museum. I could not comprehend the meaning of my experience, whether it had been a spiritual vision, or simply a fainting fit set off by the stress of an exhausting morning. But I did know that my investigation into the RI-002 mystery would no longer be simply a hobby to pass my retirement years. From that day, my quest to determine the fate of my friend would consume my entire life.



The wreckage of RI-002

A MATTER BETWEEN STATES

JAKARTA

April 1993

After the incident in the Aviation Museum, I continued my researches with renewed vigor. A few months later I tracked down Hadi Santoso, the son of the reserve copilot on the last flight of RI-002.

When the presumed remains of his father were discovered in April 1978, Hadi traveled to Tanjung Karang to seek further information. There, he was shown six coffins, one larger than the others, but was not allowed to examine the contents. However, when the escorting officer left the room, a sympathetic guard showed Hadi a necklace that had been found in the cockpit. Hadi confirmed that it was the necklace his father had always worn. He asked the guard for more information, and was told that the necklace had been discovered during the second investigation, when a larger team had been able to spend some days at the site, unearthing the buried cockpit and other sections of the aircraft. The necklace had been found wrapped around a skull laying on the right-hand seat of the cockpit.

This surprised Hadi, and me. As reserve copilot, Santoso would have been sitting with the radio operator or navigator, or even in the passenger cabin. This was the first indication that

Bob might not have been at the controls when RI-002 slammed into Mount Punggur. I had been well acquainted with Bambang Saptoadji, and knew that the ambitious young airman jealously guarded his right to the copilot's seat on the Dakota.

Moreover, I doubt that Bob would have given the right-hand seat to Santoso as a training opportunity when flying over remote and rugged territory in an aircraft carrying a quarter-ton of gold. Of course, there might be other explanations, even ones so mundane as Bambang coming down with severe intestinal cramps from a lunch at Branti airstrip (not an uncommon occurrence at roadside food stalls in tropical Sumatra) that would affect his ability to fly.

But the story of the necklace reminded me that none of the documentation of the crash investigation included mention of Bob's dog tags. Many US Navy veterans, including Bob, wore their service-issued metal tags around their neck at all times: as a good-luck charm, a symbol of camaraderie with other military pilots, and, in line with the gallows humor of professional fliers, to ensure that their remains are returned to their home towns after buying the farm in some distant land. If the investigation teams could have found Santoso's necklace in the right-hand seat, logically they would have recovered Bob's dog tags from the left-hand side of the cockpit.

But without the report of the second investigation team, this was only guesswork. It is entirely possible that the second report was simply misplaced. If so, I could have easily overlooked it, since I had been searching the records on my own, without any assistance from the archive staff. But the second investigation team report would prove to be only one of many key documents to have vanished for unclear reasons. In the next years I would find that the paper trail generated by the disappearance of RI-002 was more notable for pieces that were missing than for documents that were found.

This increasingly baffling mystery took another supernatural turn when I met Hadi Santoso again, this time with his mother, Soenarti. She told me of being invited to Talang Betutu, an Air Force base near Palembang. This was in 1977, the year before the two farmers stumbled onto the wreckage of RI-002 on Mount Punggur. At the time, the Air Force was implementing an extensive renovation of facilities. Bambang Saptoadji had been honored by the naming of an officers dormitory at Jakarta's Halim air base. Now, his fellow aviator Santoso would be similarly recognized at Talang Betutu. This was appropriate, as Santoso had once commanded the wartime airstrip in nearby Karangendah, the field on which Bob and I had made a test landing during the third CALI flight.

The Republic did not have the opportunity to make use of Karangendah. A few months after our successful test, the base was taken by the Dutch during their July 1947 offensive. Santoso led his officers and airmen on a strategic retreat to Java. However, the cooks, cleaners, and gardeners stayed to continue their jobs under the Dutch. Rural Indonesians fortunate to obtain even menial positions tended to remain in their job for decades, as they are often the primary support of many dependents. After independence, the army assumed control of Karangendah to use as the base for an armored division. Most of the Karangendah staff were relocated to the Air Force facility at Talang Betutu, where some still worked.

Having, in turn, served the Dutch and the Republic of Indonesia as fortunes of war ebbed and flowed across the lowlands of southern Sumatra, many had fond memories of their former commander, who always had had a kind or encouraging word for even the most junior subordinate or employee. Those still working at Talang Betutu had invited their retired co-workers to the ceremony to pay their respects to the widow of their beloved for-

mer commander. Soenarti was touched, and then profoundly astonished when they told her about their distress at seeing Santoso confined for several days on the base by the Dutch.

Soenarti pressed for more information. The men told her that in late 1948 they had been startled to see a large aircraft land on the airstrip, which was used only for fighters and other small airplanes. They were not allowed to approach the craft, which was guarded around the clock. However, they did identify their former commander among the passengers and crew when they were taken from the airplane to a nearby building, where they would remain under guard for several days. Then, one morning, both the aircraft and crew were gone.

Perhaps this shocking news contributed to the fainting attack Soenarti suffered during the ceremony in the sweltering mess hall a short time afterward. She was brought back to consciousness by a fellow guest claiming to be a *dukun*, a shaman, who told her that she had been possessed by the soul of her late husband. He said that in her delirium she had shouted:

“The trees! So high! We’re going to crash!”

Haunted by the experience, Soenarti visited several practitioners of the mystic arts, but none could provide more information. Her vision was confirmed, if that is the word, the following year when the farmers found the wreckage of RI-002 on Mount Punggur.

I was fascinated by this information. I offered to help, citing my own modest ability to contact the unseen world that exists in parallel with the physical universe. Initially, Soenarti was reluctant to revisit the painful and frustrating experiences with other mystics. But with the encouragement of her son, she finally agreed.

Hadi closed the door to the salon so we would not be disturbed by others in the household. I invited Soenarti and Hadi to join me as I softly intoned the Islamic chants brought to Indonesia by wandering Sufi clerics centuries ago. While the others

continued to chant, I used my training to slip into a meditative state and seek guidance in the spirit world. As the room where I sat faded from my perception, I attempted to peer back through the decades, to the moment I had glimpsed a few months previously in the Aviation Museum, when an airplane full of terrified souls —a craft where I had spent most of a year and knew almost as intimately as my own body—was seconds from destruction.

Afterward, Hadi escorted me to my automobile. I told him that I had failed, that implacable forces were concealing the truth, like an enormous wall that I could not scale or go around. Hadi said that my experience was similar to that of the other mystic practitioners his mother had visited over the years. They had all said, in their own words but with the same general meaning:

“It is very difficult to get the answers, since this is a matter between states ...”

FLEDGLINGS

JOGJAKARTA

October 1947

On mornings when I did not awaken in a hotel room in a foreign capital (or in the cabin of RI-002 parked on an isolated air strip), I would take my breakfast of coffee and fried cassava (and, when available, a single boiled egg) on the terrace of the Hotel Tugu with some of my fellow officers. It was my favorite time of day, a chance to relax and trade views with my colleagues before boarding the train at the Tugu railway station across the street that would take us to our duties at Maguwo air base.

This was the crossroads of Jogjakarta: aircraft on the approach path to Maguwo droned overhead; gleaming locomotives, manned from carriage sweeper to engineer by Indonesians, steamed proudly into the station; lumbering ox carts, driven by barefoot farmers clad in rough-woven, striped *lurik* shirts in tatters after years of continual wear, hauled produce from outlying farms to the Beringhardjo market a few hundred meters to the south.

One morning I shared my sparse breakfast with Bambang Saptoadji and Moeljono, both recruited and trained by Augustus Adisucipto in early 1946. Suryadarma had assigned them both to join RI-002 on the return to Manila a few days hence.

This would be their first time out of Java: they peppered me with questions about what to expect in Manila. As we chatted, we heard the distinct drone of a Japanese Curen biplane, and looked up. The aircraft banked to circle around the Hotel Merdeka, which lay across the railway tracks from the Hotel Tugu. We could clearly see Bob in the cockpit. The layout and location near the railway station made the Hotel Merdeka readily identifiable from the air. Bob was giving the hotel employees a show by circling the hotel and wagging his wings. He then banked and headed north toward Mount Merapi, the active volcano overlooking the city.

Though Bambang and Moeljono held Bob in high professional esteem, they nonetheless chafed at the American pilot's depiction in the regional press as "Indonesia's One Man Air Force". With eight pilots (admittedly with barely a hundred hours of flight time among them) and a score of airplanes, the Air Force of the Republic of Indonesia was, eighteen months after inauguration, in full flight.

The stirring sight of an Indonesian at the controls of an aircraft, a feat once solely the preserve of the Dutch, became a key feature of our initial efforts to inspire our people. The Banteng, the Curen flown by Augustinus Adisucipto, was regularly spotted in the skies over Javanese towns. When the Air Force was established in April 1946, Adisucipto set to work selecting and training skilled and intelligent youths such as Bambang and Moeljono to provide pilots for all of the serviceable aircraft.

The recruits learned the rudiments of aviation in Curen biplanes, which were, in fact, designed specifically for training. Unfortunately, the Curen was an advanced trainer intended to be used by experienced pilots to hone their aerial combat skills. A fledgling aviator in command of this three-hundred-and-fifty horsepower, high-performance machine was in the same potentially catastrophic position as a driving student behind the

wheel of a race car. But the cadets defied probability (and perhaps the laws of aerodynamics) to gain their wings without suffering any serious accident.

Scant weeks after their first time at the controls of an airplane, Bambang and Moeljono joined Adisucipto and fellow pilots in the skies over Java and Sumatra, astonishing large crowds with displays of simple aerobatics. In an era when most people still looked upward at the sound of an airplane, the spectacle of Indonesians in command of these flying monsters played no small role in developing our sense of national pride. Our airmen were regarded as heroic figures, even during the occasional embarrassing displays of inexperience. During one demonstration in Bandung, for example, Bambang executed a “ground loop” on landing. The aircraft spun out of control, damaging a wing and forcing Bambang to take the train back to Jogjakarta.

When the Dutch invaded Republican territories on 21 July 1947, bad weather over Jogjakarta prevented their bombers from destroying our rag-tag fleet on the ground. The following week, five of our pilots fired up the most serviceable of our decrepit Japanese cast-offs and flew northward to bomb Dutch military posts in Semarang and Ambarawa.

Moeljono flew the single purpose-built bomber at our disposal, a Mitsubishi Ki-51 Guntai. It was a textbook mission, dropping 400 kilograms of explosives over a military post outside of Semarang. On the other hand, the attack on the munitions base near Ambarawa in the mountains north of Semarang, was a marvel of improvisation. The “bombardier” sitting in the cockpit of the Curen simply cradled the small bomb in his lap, then heaved it over the side at what he considered to be the most suitable moment. Like the Doolittle Raid on Japan a few months after Pearl Harbor, which caused negligible damage but unnerved the Japanese commanders while boosting American morale, this surprise aerial attack delivered a major blow to Dutch complacency.

For Bambang Saptoadji, however, the Ambarawa raid was only a disappointment. He was assigned as pilot of a powerful Hayabusa fighter to be a wing man for the bombers. But the temperamental engine of his aircraft failed during his take-off run. He could only stand on the tarmac and watch his fellow pilots vanish into the sky to the north, returning in triumph an hour later. He would have to wait for his own opportunity for recognition as more than a cocky young flier.

Bambang never had his chance, as we never again dared to attack the Dutch directly by air. Nevertheless, our inexperienced pilots and rattletrap aircraft played a decisive role in our struggle. With land routes between Republican territories severed by the Dutch, the Air Force became the primary means of communication and logistical support for far-flung revolutionary strongholds. A typical mission would be to re-supply a mountaintop radio outpost by flying perilously low to the terrain to drop a drum of fuel mounted on the bomb rack of our Guntai bomber. Flying without maps, pilots could only navigate by dead reckoning and the fortuitous sighting of a distinctive volcano or other prominent landmark. One pilot invented his own fail-safe navigation technique. If he found himself completely disoriented, he would simply swoop low enough to read the signboard of a railway station.

The arrival of Bob and his Dakota provided a valuable opportunity to train our pilots on larger aircraft, anticipating the day when our air force would have its own cargo planes, and perhaps even bombers powerful enough to mount major aerial raids. Bob proved to be a natural teacher, insisting on perfection when necessary, but ignoring trivial issues to concentrate on refining essential skills. For example, he told me of one copilot who would bank the plane to the right when leaning over to check his landing gear.

“Did you correct him?” I asked.

“Nope,” Bob replied. “It’s not too bad. It’s only for a few seconds and he will level the wings again when he finishes his inspection. But it’s a funny habit.”

While Bob’s aviation skills were second-to-none, he did not have much of an opportunity to acquire more than the rudiments of the Indonesian language. Working as Bob’s “copilot” on all domestic missions, I handled communication with the crew, passengers, and airfield personnel. But Bob was often on his own when conducting flight training with our pilots, none of whom could speak more than a most basic level of English.

One humorous anecdote about this communications gap involved Bambang Saptoadji. Until he first sat in the right-hand seat of RI-002, Bambang’s experience had been limited to antiquated Japanese aircraft with fixed gear and a control stick. As RI-002 approached Maguwo at the end of Bambang’s first training flight, Bob ordered “gear down,” which Bambang correctly executed. Bob then asked: “Got a wheel?” At this point Bambang’s minimal English-language skills failed him. He answered “yes” and reaffirmed his response by gripping the control wheel in front of him. Bob repeated: “Got a wheel?” Again “yes”, followed by an even more demonstrative grip on the wheel, while his face showed evident confusion. Bob leaned over and said, calmly: “Got a *landing* wheel?”

Now understanding Bob’s question, Bambang looked out of the right cockpit window and saw that the wheel under the right engine, invisible to Bob in the left-hand captain’s seat, was fully extended and locked into landing position. He turned around to face Bob, grinned, and took his hands off the control wheel to give a two-thumbs-up gesture: expressing firm assurance that all was in order. Then, realizing what he had just done, Bambang’s face registered embarrassed panic as he grabbed the airplane’s control wheel again with a decidedly exaggerated grip.

BAMBU RUNCING

JOGJAKARTA

November 1947

One morning my breakfast on the Hotel Tugu terrace was enlivened by a parade of *laskar*, the term for gangs of youths organized into informal militias. Most members of this lascar were in their mid- to late- teens, dressed in near-rags and each proudly bearing a two-meter length of green bamboo. One end of the light, strong bamboo was whittled to a razor-sharp point. In skilled hands, a *bambu runcing* can wreak havoc in close-quarters combat. However, the Dutch rarely obliged by stepping into reach before firing their guns, so the laskar boys were taking out insurance.

Their destination this morning was a shrine on the slopes of Mount Merapi, the active volcano that dominates the landscape to the north. The guardian of the shrine, which lies within sight of the steaming crater, was a famous *dukun* reputed to be able to tap the awesome spiritual power of the fire mountain he would bless their bamboo spears, conferring a spell of invulnerability on the bearer.

One of my breakfast companions related the story of a laskar leader who recently had returned to the mountain in fury and threatened the dukun with retribution because one of his warriors,

his younger brother, had been killed during a botched raid on a Dutch outpost. The dukun asked for details, and was told that the brother had been shot by a Dutch officer wielding a pistol.

That explains it, the dukun replied. My magic spell was meant to protect against rifle fire, not handguns.

My companions and I laughed at the fanciful superstitions of these sons of farmers and fisherman who believed that pointed sticks and magic spells would prevail over modern firearms. While we openly acknowledged the genuine bravery of the militia boys, we also believed that only a trained, disciplined army could properly serve our struggle.

The roots of the laskar lay in the final months of the Japanese occupation. As the tide of war turned against Japan and an allied invasion became a real possibility, all boys of high-school age were compelled to join youth militias called PETA, *Pembela Tanah Air*, Defenders of the Homeland. They would spend several afternoons a week marching around football fields with wooden rifles.

The Allies only invaded Morotai and other islands in the far east of the archipelago before thrusting northward to Japan, so the Japanese remained in control of most of Indonesia until the war ended in August 1945. The terms of surrender called for the occupation forces to maintain security and order until Allied troops could be dispatched.

In Java, the Japanese commanders decided to best implement these instructions by handing their weapons to the youthful militias they had helped to establish, then retiring to the countryside to await repatriation. At the time I was in Semarang, where I had taught high school since my expulsion from medical school. Reports poured in about Japanese-trained (and now Japanese-armed) militias fashioning themselves as independent freedom fighters. My students were eager to set up their own group, and looked to me as their natural leader. Though I was only 26 years old, by the

standards of the era, when our statesmen were barely middle-aged and our senior military commanders in their early thirties, they regarded me as a fully mature adult, especially since I was captain of the high-school football team. My students and their friends gathered into a militia eventually known as Pasukan T.

Initially, we restricted our activities to the sort of basic training they practiced in the PETA militias. Each afternoon, I would order my troops to march around a football field, with wooden clubs taking the place of real firearms. I knew this basic training only served to keep young, enthusiastic, would-be soldiers occupied. Our first priority was to secure real weapons.

Other militias made do with bambu runcing, but I felt that, no matter how deadly these weapons can be in close-quarter fighting, sharp sticks would be no more effective than our wooden "rifles" against the Dutch guns we would face during a skirmish. We conducted a few night-time "raids", as we termed our benign visits to the dormitories of Japanese civilians to look for firearms and other useful objects. I used to stress in my briefings that we were not to touch any money or personal belongings having no military value. I am proud to say that my boys were from good and decent families and that none contravened my instructions. We never encountered even the slightest resistance. But neither did we find any firearms, since those civilians, expecting the raids, may already have surrendered their weapons to the military. We confiscated only one air rifle, one set of binoculars, and a number of samurai swords.

We had more luck acting against the Japanese military itself. One evening, armed with our newly acquired samurai swords, we stopped a car and were surprised to find Kempeitai soldiers, unarmed except for one sergeant with a pistol. They obeyed our order to step out of the car. We confiscated the pistol and searched the vehicle. Since we found nothing suspicious, we al-

lowed them to go. The boys gave the pistol to me—our first firearm. Soon, more would follow, but I kept this pistol for myself because the shape was similar to the ray gun used by Flash Gordon in the popular movie serial.

In subsequent days, we found several more firearms hidden in wells and other places, and were soon fully-equipped soldiers. All we lacked was an enemy. It would be months before Dutch troops ventured into Java, but this did not deter the members of Pasukan T. Word soon came of an Ambonese, a native of the eastern islands of the archipelago, who had married a local woman and settled in an outlying village near the airport. Two Pasukan T members, Pek Poedjioetomo and Koeswoyo, guns in hand, went to the “Dutch spy's” house and called for him to come outside and be interrogated.

Amboinese are known for their affinity to the Dutch colonials: most of the native soldiers in the colonial army were from that region. They also tend to be bigger and stronger than most other Indonesians, as was this “Dutch Spy,” who was in no mood to have his private evening at home with his wife disrupted by two high-school boys playing soldier. The Amboinese left his house and walked right up to Pek, wresting his gun away without effort. As he struggled to retrieve his firearm, Pek called on Koeswoyo to fire his pistol. Koeswoyo let off a number of shots, one of which killed the Amboinese. He also, as it later turned out, had shot Pek in the foot.

I realized that more such tragic-comic incidents would likely follow if we continued as an independent, untrained militia. I managed to convince senior officers of the newly established National Police that we wanted to defend our Republic as part of the official armed forces. As a result, my boys were integrated into the Auxiliary Police Force of Semarang. They wore the new unit's uniform and each carried a rifle with fifty rounds of ammunition. Un-

fortunately, as a consequence of this new status, Pasukan T could not remain one compact group. They were subject to detailing for guard duties together with elements of the National Police, and were therefore spread out through locations all over Semarang.

Our career as policemen was brief. British forces, including a number of much-feared Gurkha units, landed in late September to facilitate repatriation of interned European civilians and prisoners of war. As the Dutch, themselves recovering from years of wartime occupation, would not be arriving in any great numbers until the end of the year, the British did what they could to keep civil order, at least in the towns. Their first act was to confiscate all weapons carried by civilians, including the police. My boys and I avoided surrendering our hard-won weapons by retreating twenty-five kilometers to the west, to the small town of Kendal, from where we launched sporadic raids. But I remained fearful that without the discipline of a formal organization, we would degenerate into a gang of thugs. So I disbanded my little militia and moved to Salatiga, a mountain town south of Semarang, where my “extensive military experience” and “advanced age” gained me a commission as a senior officer in the Army of the Republic of Indonesia.

While the British troops brought a large measure of stability to most of Java, in Surabaya the situation was in continual turmoil. This major port had been the headquarters of the Japanese naval forces in the archipelago. The Navy had been especially sympathetic to our revolution, and had turned over almost all of their firearms to the local militias in the days following the cessation of hostilities. The militias mounted a number of symbolic street actions, most notably climbing onto the roof of the Hotel Oranje, then the city's leading hotel, and tearing the bottom blue stripe from the Dutch flag to produce the *merah putih*, the Indonesian flag.

Had the militias restricted their activities to this sort of street theater, they might have kept alive the spirit of nationalism without bloodshed. But, as any police officer will tell you, passionate teenagers and loaded guns are a deadly combination. Fierce skirmishes raged between the British forces and militias during much of October. To defuse the situation, the British flew Soekarno and Hatta from Batavia to appeal for calm. Militia leaders did agree to a ceasefire, but scarcely six hours after the two Republican leaders had returned to Batavia, a militia contingent ambushed a British convoy, resulting in the death of Brigadier A.W.S. Mallaby, the commander of the British forces. The following month, the British staged a massive reprisal that killed thousands of militiamen. Indonesia commemorates the carnage as the Battle of Surabaya. However, it was less a battle than a slaughter, as untrained, undisciplined youths faced some of the most formidable warriors in the world.

The massacre at Surabaya provided stark and brutal evidence that the Republic needed a professional army who could pick their battles, fighting with reasoned strategy and strict discipline. At that point, the Army of the Republic of Indonesia consisted of a handful of former Dutch colonial army officers; a larger body of officers, like myself, who were educated but had no formal military background, and a mass of enthusiastic recruits with no qualifications beyond a burning desire to fight for their freedom. Somehow we had to transform this motley band into an effective and resourceful guerrilla force.

In 1946, the Army absorbed many of the Japanese-trained student militias as auxiliary forces: the *Tentara Pelajar* and *Tentara Pelajar Genie*. Both groups saw action during the first Dutch aggression in July 1947. While their actions did little to impede the advance of mechanized columns, their bravery and courage under fire indicated that they could be fashioned into a formidable guerrilla army.

The most able and dedicated of these young freedom fighters were sent to Jogjakarta to be trained under Captain Ignacio Espina, the Filipino intelligence officer we carried on our marathon flight from the Philippines to Jogjakarta in September 1947. Ining, as we called him, had spent three years as a resistance fighter during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, participating in raids against Japanese positions in conditions similar to those of rural Java and Sumatra. This valuable experience, and his subsequent training as a member of an elite squadron of a professional army, made Captain Espina an ideal mentor for our own impassioned but untutored freedom fighters.

During October and November 1947, Ining instructed his young proteges on the essentials of guerrilla warfare: living off the land, stealthy infiltration, fashioning explosives from chemicals found in farms and kitchens. Thanks in large part to Ining's assistance, during the following months we would enjoy remarkable success in ground-based maneuvers throughout Java, where we could depend on the active support and protection of sympathetic local residents. The *Tentara Pelajar* would execute a number of daring operations, blocking roads, destroying bridges, and on one occasion crippling an armed Dutch convoy.

These actions would prove crucial to our strategy to win global recognition of our right to self-determination. By continually harassing Dutch positions and impeding movement, we inflicted major injury to Dutch complacency, and demonstrated to a watching world that the Republic would accept no less than complete autonomy.

While Bob's stoicism and disregard for personal comfort were legendary, I suspect that his frequent visits to Hong Kong and Bangkok, which then, as now, provided single men with countless opportunities for recreation, helped him to handle the stress of revolutionary life. Captain Espina, on the other hand,

was left to endure his hardship in solitude. Only recently emerged from three years of guerrilla warfare in the Philippine hinterland, Ining was now alone amid a strange culture, unable to speak the language and far from the diversions of Manila.

I was nominally responsible for Ining during his sojourn in Java. I had arranged accommodation in an empty house on the northern outskirts of Jogjakarta, on the edge of the dense forests and rugged highland terrain where he would train his teenage guerrillas to strike swiftly then steal silently away.

As the weeks passed, I noticed the usually gregarious Filipino was becoming increasingly despondent and irascible. This was a concern. Though Ining and his student soldiers shared a common Malay heritage, he remained a foreigner, from whom our freedom fighters, finally free of the overbearing Dutch, would brook no disrespect. I often witnessed Ining loudly berating his charges, cursing in Tagalog, of which I had learned a few choice words during my weeks stranded in Manila. I worried that one or more of the boys might finally crack and lash back with considerable violence and terrible consequences.

Ining needed the companionship of his peers: educated military officers. I asked my brother, Mas Ded, to visit whenever he could spare the time. Another air force officer, George Reuneker, one of the many Indos who sided with the Republic, also visited when he could. I shared with Ining a fondness for a good drink, so whenever I visited I would bring a bottle of whiskey purchased at the destination of a blockade run, or a traditional tipple (based on fermented rice, cassava or palm sap) from another region of the Republic. At the time, I did not realize that providing the means for Ining to drown his loneliness might not have been the best expression of hospitality. I would soon learn how tragically I had misjudged this awkward situation.

OLD AIRMEN'S TALES

JAKARTA

September – November 1994

American acquaintances of my age, aptly named the Greatest Generation for their stoic endurance of the hard times of the 1930s and for their courage displayed on European and Pacific battlefields, often remark that the immediate post-war years had been the best of their lives. Confident in victory and prosperous in the booming economy, they cruised open highways and courted their future wives in their own automobiles before settling down to produce the next generation of Americans: the Baby Boomers.

We of Indonesia's Generation of 1945 also cherish memories of that period. Toughened by the horrors and hardships of the Japanese occupation, we channeled our own new-found confidence into realizing the dream of building a nation. However, unlike those fortunate to live in prosperous America, few of us would care to relive the privations, fears, and dangers that marked those years of struggle. But we do often like to reminisce about the nobility of the times: the courage, inventiveness, and strong adherence to ideals—values increasingly difficult to find in modern Indonesia. For me, there is no better companion for these nostalgic journeys than my dear friend Alex Kawilarang.

An outstanding military leader, Alex served with great distinction as a colonel during the revolution. He had been a member of Indonesia's tiny corps of professional soldiers, graduates of the Royal Dutch Military Academy. His ability, courage, and charisma gained him the highest respect of classmates, colleagues, and even enemies, including some of those very fighter pilots whom Bob and I had gone to great lengths to avoid.

One such erstwhile nemesis was Paul Verspoor, who had led a fighter squadron of the *Militarie Luchvaart*, the aviation arm of the *Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger*, or KNIL, the Royal Netherlands Indies Army. Paul was also a high-school friend and military academy classmate of Alex, and the two remained good friends through the vicissitudes of relations between their respective governments.

After independence, Verspoor moved to the Netherlands and a distinguished career in the Royal Netherlands Air Force, retiring with the rank of major-general. This relocation was difficult for Verspoor, as he regarded the East Indies as his homeland. Verspoor could trace his family's presence in the archipelago to the late VOC era, and would visit Indonesia every few years with the same wistful nostalgia of an immigrant to America visiting the old country.

During lunch in a Jakarta restaurant famed for Dutch colonial decor and cuisine, Alex told me of an occasion when Verspoor had visited Jakarta in the company of another retired *Militarie Luchvaart* aviator and both their wives. Alex had hosted a dinner for the travelers in the very restaurant where we now enjoyed our extended lunch. As is the custom of old soldiers during a reunion, talk had turned to recounting past exploits.

As usual, Alex dominated the conversation, relating his often-harrowing combat experiences during our struggle and when suppressing separatist revolts during the early years of the Republic. Alex knew that Verspoor had not seen direct action while

leading his squadron based in Medan, and that during his years in the Netherlands had focused on peacetime aviation activities, such as establishing his air forces' aerobatic-display squadron. He assumed that Verspoor's companion had had a similarly uneventful military career, as so was surprised when he boasted of an exploit: a "shotless kill" of a blockade-running Dakota.

I froze. There were only two Dakotas lost during the struggle for freedom: VT-CLA, shot down on approach to Maguwo on the afternoon of the Ambarrawa raid, and RI-002. VT-CLA had definitely been a conventional kill: witnesses reported that smoke had poured from the damaged aircraft before impact, and that the fuselage had been riddled with bullet holes. That left RI-002. I pressed Alex for more information, but he could add only a few minor details; understandable given that I was asking him to remember a gin-fueled night of bragging about military glory some years before. He had even forgotten the name of Verspoor's friend.

I needed more information. Perhaps this anonymous aviator's memory was good enough to supply flight details from the incident. I grabbed Alex by the shoulders and demanded: "Take me to the guest house right now!" The cozy, family-run hotel where Paul Verspoor and his friend had stayed was located only a short distance from the restaurant, so we walked there, Alex grumbling all the way. The owner-manager also grumbled when I implored him to search for the guest registry from several years back.

Fortunately, Alex enjoys wide recognition and high esteem among Indonesians of our generation. He persuaded the manager to "humor his old friend" and ransack his storage room. The manager disappeared into the back of the building, emerging some time later with guest registers from previous years. We soon found Paul Verspoor's name, and the manager confirmed that the following entry was that of his travel companion: Guus van Strijp. That entry included, to my relief, a full mailing address

in the Dutch township of Vaught. I mailed a letter to Guus van Strijp requesting a few particulars about the encounter with the doomed aircraft of his story: altitude, course, duration of chase. I explained that I was trying to dispel the many rumors and intense speculation about the event. Then I waited for an answer that might finally solve the mystery of RI-002.

Weeks later, when mail from the Netherlands did arrive, it brought only disappointment. It was my original letter, marked *Inconnu*, Recipient Unknown. Several months afterward, Alex Kawilarang traveled to the Netherlands for medical reasons. He offered to track down van Strijp through Paul Verspoor during the weeks he would be in Europe. He met Verspoor, and discovered that his friend had a much different recollection of the night in question.

Verspoor, who is noted for an excellent memory even in his advanced years, replied with confidence that van Strijp had not been a pilot, but a navigator, with no exploits of his own to tell. According to Verspoor, van Strijp had simply repeated a story which had achieved legendary status in Dutch Air Force lore: the fighter pilots who had racked up a kill of an enemy aircraft without actually shooting it down.

In Verspoor's version of the events, Dutch military intelligence had reported that VT-CLA was flying important Republican officials into Jogjakarta, and so the *Militarie Luchvaart* was instructed to intercept the aircraft and divert it to the Dutch-controlled airstrip at Semarang on the north coast of Java. Archive documents do reveal that a high-priority intercept order was issued on that day, along with a memo noting that detaining the passengers would have severely crippled the Republican government. In this assumption, however, the Dutch authorities were mistaken. The Dakota had carried Agustinus Adisucipto and Abdurrachman Saleh, Indonesia's most accomplished

aviators. They were important figures in a symbolic, morale-boosting sense, but their detainment would not affect government operation in the slightest.

Verspoor reiterated the official report that the pilots had intercepted VT-CLA as it descended for the final approach to Maguwo. That approach path lay over what was, at the time, dense forest. The pilots fired anti-aircraft rounds into the trees to the left of the Dakota, to attract the attention of the captain and perhaps to spook him with a spectacular display of exploding tree trunks. At that point, according to the Dutch pilots, the Dakota then lurched sideways and went into a steep dive, plowing into the earth far short of the runway.

Good memory or not, Verspoor's recollections were suspect in my eyes. The deadly attack on a humanitarian flight had been one of the defining events of our revolution, yet more proof that we could not hope to negotiate with our former colonial masters. All Jogjakarta heard the stories of hospital personnel finding bullet wounds in the bodies of the crash victims. I had once met the captain, Alexander Constantine, and knew him to have been a seasoned Royal Air Force squadron leader unlikely to panic and lose control of his aircraft.

To my considerable surprise, Alex stood by his friend, maintaining that Verspoor had had no personal reason to lie or prevaricate, especially about events in which he had not been involved. Alex explained that although Verspoor possessed the wartime experience and professional qualifications required for top command, he had opted to retire as a major-general instead of involving himself in the politics needed for promotion to a staff position. If a man such as Verspoor was satisfied that the Dutch fighters had fired only warning shots, Alex insisted, and that the pilot of VT-CLA had crashed while attempting low-altitude evasive maneuvers (as described in official Dutch reports of the incident), then that is probably what happened.

Verspoor had also dismissed the possibility that a Dakota had been shot down over Sumatra the first week of October 1948. Verspoor claimed that he had been lying in wait for RI-002 himself that week, as leader of a squadron patrolling the airspace around Bukittinggi on what he termed "a very boring mission". If RI-002 had been intercepted by another squadron, Verspoor noted, he would have been informed, if only to abort his own squadron's mission and not waste resources searching for an aircraft that had already been captured. Verspoor made some good points, but I was nonetheless unwilling to admit that my theory had been shot down in flames, so to speak. Then I remembered an incident that suggested Verspoor might be correct after all.

During one "milk run", when we were returning to Jogjakarta with low-value cargo and no passengers, Bob gave me an unforgettable demonstration of a Dakota's stall characteristics. Cruising a thousand meters over the Sumatra forest, he throttled down the engines and then asked me to pull back on the control yoke in front of me. The air speed dropped, and I felt a violent shudder, first on the yoke, then in my seat as the vibrations spread through the air frame. I expected Bob to take control of the Dakota, but he calmly instructed me to gently push the nose back down and apply low power. We gained air speed, and I could feel full control returning as we leveled out and resumed normal flight.

Bob then took the controls, revved the engines to full power, dropped the flaps to full position, and hauled back violently on the yoke. This time, with no warning whatsoever, the Dakota lurched to the left. I looked past Bob and out of the window to see the ground rushing toward us as the Dakota threw itself into a sickening plunge. I fought to control my panic as Bob expertly nudged the yoke and throttles, coercing the aircraft back into stable flight.

Ignoring my shaking hands and ashen face, Bob explained that the unique characteristics of the Dakota's swept wing, which gives

the craft such unparalleled stability at low speeds, causes an instant cessation of air flow over one aileron during such a full-power stall, resulting in a sudden and complete loss of attitude control. I looked again at the ground, now slowly receding as the Dakota regained cruising altitude. Had this been a real emergency, and without such a skilled pilot as Bob Freeberg at the controls, we certainly would have disappeared into that featureless green wilderness.

Even the most experienced pilots can make a wrong decision under intense pressure. Constantine might well have thrown his Dakota into a full-power stall at low altitude as he abandoned his landing approach and attempted to evade the Dutch fighters. If so, that long-ago conversation had been about the VT-CLA crash, not a possible interception of RI-002. I therefore might now have no real evidence of Dutch involvement in my friend's disappearance. After years of research, I was back where I started: with many theories, a few tantalizing clues—but not a shred of proof. I despaired that the fate of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 would forever remain a mystery.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

JAKARTA

October 1995

During his second term in office, American President Bill Clinton mandated a significant expansion of his nation's Freedom of Information Act, making troves of classified American documents available to the public. Of particular interest to historians, citizens unjustly accused of "anti-American activities", and families having a loved one who had met a mysterious fate, were documents dating from the Cold War period. The expanded powers of the Freedom of Information Act were soon applied to solving the mysteries of that deliberately murky period in world history. I hoped that somewhere in the growing flood of declassified documents from embassies and other sources in the region might lie a clue to Bob's eventual fate.

I soon discovered that freedom of information does not mean that the process of obtaining that information is free from tiresome labor and frustration. Fortunately, my previous contact at the embassy, Pamela Hyde Smith, then the Press Attaché, had been rotated back to Washington. Though now a world away from Indonesia, she remained enthusiastic about my quest, and eagerly volunteered her services. Whenever she could set aside time from official duties Pam combed the national diplomatic archives and re-

quested the declassification of documents with possible relevance, no matter how remote, to the Freeberg case. In time, her perseverance paid off, and in April 1995 I received copies of numerous diplomatic dispatches containing mentions of Bob Freeberg.

The first dispatch, a cable from the American consulate in Batavia to the State Department, dated 14 October 1948, was a response to a request for information about the disappearance of RI-002 from Clyde M. Reed, the senator from Bob's home state of Kansas. The dispatch confirmed that the cursory investigation into the disappearance, in which an officer was sent to Palembang to ask residents if they had seen a large airplane, was in response to a direct request from Reed.

Further mentions in diplomatic dispatches indicated that Reed continued to press for information, but the American consulate always came up empty-handed. Reed was also instrumental in securing the assistance of Merle Cochrane of the Good Offices Committee. But even the intervention of the United Nations could not budge the Dutch from their contention that RI-002 had simply vanished into thin air, as it were.

Other dispatches offered tantalizing clues that the Dutch were not telling the whole truth. A letter dated 30 November 1948 from the American Consulate in Singapore noted a visit to that office by two accused gun-runners recently released from detention at Tanjung Pinang, a Dutch-controlled island lying a short distance south of Singapore. The dispatch includes a statement by one of the men who claimed that after his release, while waiting on the dock at Tanjung Pinang to board a boat to Singapore, he was handed a scrap of paper by a dock worker, on which was written the word "Freeberg". The man also mentioned that a Dutch warship had arrived at the port on 24 November 1948, a few days before the incident.

A cable dated from the American Embassy in Bangkok mentions an unconfirmed report that American pilot Robert Freeberg was imprisoned in Tanjung Pinang and would soon be transferred to Glodok prison in Batavia. I took action on this document by seeking the assistance of the Indonesian Department of Justice. They acted promptly on my request for information, but without result, since all records for Glodok were lost when the prison was relocated to Tangerang, a suburb of Jakarta, some decades before.

One diplomatic dispatch actually brought a smile to my face. It was a memorandum of an informal meeting between an officer of the American embassy in Manila and Raden M. M. Soerianata Djoemena, First Secretary of the Netherlands Legation to the Philippines. The aristocratic title *raden* and Javanese name indicated that Djoemena had been one of the native elite, like my father, who had prospered under Dutch rule.

The memo stated that Djoemena arrived at the Embassy unannounced to deliver a detailed manifest of the cargo confiscated from American gun runners his government had intercepted the previous week. The officer was surprised that Djoemena would so informally deliver legal evidence relating to an ongoing criminal case, which at any rate they had already received from their own sources. The American's surprise turned to bemusement when the Dutch diplomat suddenly changed the subject, asking whether they had further information about the disappearance of Bob Freeberg. The officer assured his Dutch counterpart that they only knew what had been reported by the press. Djoemena then went to great lengths to debunk the rumors that RI-002 had been intercepted, citing the purported bad condition of the aircraft and the poor quality of fuel available in Banten.

As with other statements from Dutch officials, then and now, I was struck by the numerous inaccuracies. RI-002 did not refuel at Gorda in Banten, but had hopped over the Sunda Strait to



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Regional Office

400 South 18th Street

St. Louis, MO 63103-2271

December 4, 1995

In Reply Refer To: 331/274A19

XC-10680490

PETIT MUHARTO KARTODIRDJO
PANGKALAN JATI I NO. 43
RT04/02
PONDOK LABU, JAKARTA 12450
INDONESIA

FREEBERG, BOBBY E.

Dear Mr. Kartodirdjo:

The last entry in the records of the Department of Veterans Affairs was the American Embassy report of presumption of death. The report stated that Bobby E. Freeberg disappeared on a flight between Branti and Bengkulu on October 1, 1948. A land search discovered no wreckage. At the end of one year, based on local law, Bobby E. Freeberg was presumed dead. No information beyond that final report has ever been received. The official date of death is October 1, 1948. The remains were never recovered for burial.

I regret that I was unable to provide more favorable information. If we can be of help in the future, please feel free to contact this office.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive ink that reads "Rebecca A. Wolfe".

REBECCA A WOLFE
Veterans Services Officer

Letter from the US
Department of Veterans
Affairs declaring Bob
Freeberg to be deceased.

Branti in Sumatra, which had sufficient supplies of high-quality aviation fuel. The Dutch also must have known that while the Singapore aviation authority indeed had questioned the airworthiness of RI-002 during our stay in December 1947, Bob had spent all of July and half of August 1948 in Manila, where the Dakota underwent a complete overhaul. Despite the assertions of the Dutch, I was confident that on the first afternoon of October 1948 a healthy young captain flew an airworthy Dakota with tanks full of good-quality aviation fuel into clear skies—and met a mysterious fate that, despite all my efforts for almost a decade, I had come no nearer to solving.

One document sent me off on another direction. It was from the Deceased Veterans Division of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The document contained no new information, only stating that the Veterans Administration, the precursor agency to the current department, had followed Dutch law in declaring Robert Earl Freeberg (not “Bobby”) to be deceased on 1 October 1949, a year after his disappearance. However, the courteous cover letter accompanying the document encouraged me to try another angle: to track down Tom Lee.

Though I assumed Tom, who was somewhat older than Bob and myself and not in the best of health, had already passed, his son, Jack, would be in middle age. Perhaps his wife Marion, who was younger than Tom, might also still be alive. In the spirit of pursuing any possible source of information, I had written another letter to the officer explaining my acquaintance with Tom Lee and asking for any records he might have.

The helpful Veterans Affairs officer soon replied with Tom’s employment records, which were, it seemed, public knowledge. The records stated that Tom Lee had stayed with the Veterans

Administration until 1958, when he retired and moved to Florida, passing away in 1963. The documents gave no indication of where I might contact his next of kin, so this was yet another dead end.

However, an item caught my eye. The document listed Tom's final position with the Veterans Administration as general attorney with an annual salary of seven thousand dollars. That, by coincidence, was what I knew to be the approximate price of a new Chrysler Imperial convertible in Manila in the mid-1950s.

I knew this because in 1955 I had been posted to the Indonesian Embassy in Manila as Air Attaché. One day, while strolling near the embassy, a late-model Chrysler Imperial convertible drove past. Appropriately for such a flashy automobile, the driver was a very pretty woman. With a shock I realized that she was none other than Marion Lee, Tom's wife. Being appreciative of his presence at my wedding and his and Marion's kindness during our trips to Manila, I contacted the Veterans Administration office to ask of his current whereabouts. I was told that he was currently hospitalized, but was not too ill to receive visitors.

Marion was with her husband when I visited the hospital. I wanted to keep the visit short, in consideration of Tom's condition. But we did talk about our late friend, sharing our most pleasant memories of Bob: of his courage, determination, and his likable personality.

Tom and I joked about our "aviation qualifications". I was listed as "copilot" on most missions; Tom told me that he had been listed as "flight engineer" on the manifest of the flight from Manila to Jogjakarta on 17 September 1948. His friend, Cliff Baldwin, a field investigator for the Veterans Administration, was the "navigator."

Tom and Cliff had been stranded in Jogjakarta when RI-002 was lost two weeks later. They were finally able to secure a ride home through the assistance of the American Consulate in Batavia. But the delay in departure gave Tom the opportunity to attend my wedding in late October, in a sense representing Bob.

Tom then grew thoughtful. He admitted that he had been concerned about Bob's well-being during the months before his disappearance. Bob had been under great financial pressure, due in large part to the inability of the Republic to pay more than a fraction of our outstanding debt. Tom had suggested that Bob cut his losses and seek other opportunities in the booming aviation market. To his great credit, according to Tom, Bob did not even consider this option. As long as the Indonesians attempted in good faith to pay what we owed him, Bob had said, his Dakota would continue to bear the proud RI-002 designation.

Our reminiscences of years past were clearly tiring for Tom. Marion decided we should let him rest. I said goodbye, wished him a speedy recovery, then walked Marion out to her convertible.

A few days afterward, a newspaper advertisement caught my eye. It was for that model of automobile, and listed the price. Four decades later, I would learn that Tom's government salary had not been sufficient to be able to afford such an expensive automobile. Of course, there might have been a reasonable explanation: an inheritance or wise investment. But I now wondered whether his eagerness to treat Boedi, Pang, and myself to dinner had been more than simple hospitality and concern. Looking back, I realized that on later sojourns in Manila, when we had had sufficient funds for food and accommodation, Tom had been no less willing to set aside time for drinks or dinner with Boedi and me, and to hear our views on the situation in Jogjakarta. Furthermore, neither Bob nor Tom provided any clear explanation for his trip to Jogjakarta in September 1948.

Of course, Tom Lee was a thoroughly decent and generous person with a genuine interest in the history and politics of the region where he lived and worked. Nevertheless, I cannot discount the possibility that Tom's insatiable curiosity about the details of our struggle had been of a professional nature. I

know from my military and diplomatic experience that trained field agents and communication intercepts account for only a fraction of intelligence gathering. The bulk of information is sourced from public information sources (such as newspapers) and through conversations with local contacts. Though individual items may seem unrelated, inconsequential, or implausible (especially if supplied by strangers at a bar), intelligence analysts can be quite successful at determining patterns and correlations concealed in masses of such material.

Tom Lee might well have supplemented his official income by moonlighting for another agency of his government. If so, one or more intelligence arms would have been fully aware of Bob Freeberg's activities, and of the full extent of his relationship with the Republic of Indonesia. However, this information would most likely be classified, even 40 years later, and impossible even for Pamela Hyde Smith to access. I continued my investigations, frustrated in the realization that important clues to the mystery might exist, but lay forever out of my reach.

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MISSION TO BAGUIO

JOGJAKARTA — SINGAPORE — MANILA

November — December 1947

On the rainy evening of 27 November 1947, Bob, Boedi, and I welcomed the delegates to the ECAFE conference in the Philippines on board RI-002. Considering the importance of this flight and the stature of the passengers, Suryadarma had ordered me back into the cockpit of RI-002 as mission leader.

Maguwo field teemed with foreign journalists trying to interview members of the delegation. Bob was asked to stay out of sight, a request to which he readily agreed. But as mission leader, I was charged with getting the delegates on board and the other tasks of readying the aircraft for flight. As word spread of my fluency in the Dutch language, journalists from newspapers in Batavia and the Netherlands approached me for information. I could see in their eyes and hear in their voices an urgent need for a quote or factual item. They knew that for their readers, especially those in government and the military, this was a big story on which the future of the East Indies might depend.

The Dutch regarded this mission as a far-greater threat to their authority than running guns or dropping armed paratroopers into disputed territories. The cornerstone of Dutch propaganda was to portray our leaders as opportunist demagogues lacking the political

maturity necessary to govern a sovereign state. Without the Dutch to guide and oversee us, they argued, the islands would be ruled by scheming criminals backed by marauding gangs of armed thugs.

To be fair, they had a point. With the blockade choking off most legitimate commerce, many high-level officials did engage in outright criminal activity—at least in Dutch eyes. As Soekarno once wryly observed: “The man the Dutch call a swindler, the Indonesians call the Minister for the Economy”.

And there were a number of dubious figures in positions of considerable influence lurking in our Republic. But for every shady hustler or brutal gangster, there were scores of teachers and technicians, clerks and administrators, all diligently performing the prosaic tasks required of a functioning society. In Baguio, we would serve notice that the Republican administration was not a band of outlaws, but an effective civilian government in full control of a disciplined military and capable of providing at least basic social services. We were absolutely relying on Bob to safely deliver our knowledgeable and articulate team of representatives to argue our case at this crucial international forum.

With all on board, Bob readied for takeoff. But the rain, which had been heavy all evening, exploded into a torrential downpour. Visibility was reduced to near zero; Bob had difficulty even positioning RI-002 properly on the runway, let alone commencing a take-off roll. But Bob was fully aware of the importance of delivering the delegates on schedule; not to mention the possibility that the reports filed by the journalists might goad the Dutch into preventing the flight by military means should we delay our departure. By now Bob was thoroughly familiar with the runway at Maguwo: he gunned the engines and we punched through the driving rain.

In contrast to our stormy departure from Jogjakarta the previous night, we landed in Manila under clear skies; a good omen

for the success of this crucial conference. The delegates boarded their bus for the conference venue in Baguio. Suryadarma had ordered Bob to remain in Manila during the two weeks of the conference. If RI-002 were to fly in the meantime, and be damaged, lost, or captured, our delegates would be stranded in Manila.

Bob welcomed this chance to spend time in Manila. He could attend to other details of his life: his apartment, a jeep that was always in need of repair, and his new girl, June.

She was an American Navy nurse stationed in the Philippines. I met her a couple of times during those weeks, and found her to be a pleasant and intelligent young lady: a good match for Bob. If their relationship eventually blossomed into marriage, and our dream of an independent Indonesia came to reality, I might look forward to Bob and June making a home for themselves in the nation he was helping to bring into existence.

But that was in the future. Our priority now was to maintain our connection between Jogjakarta and the outside world. And for that, we needed to resolve the dispute over the ownership of the war-surplus Dakota now proudly known to the world as RI-002.

The court in Manila handed down the long-awaited decision the week after our arrival. It granted Bob full ownership of RI-002, and gave Walters ten days to file an appeal. During the two weeks we would wait to return the ECAFE delegates, we were free to concentrate on what the Filipinos regard as their purpose in life: parties.

Bob and his "Indonesian Boys" (as Bob referred to his crew) received social invitations almost every night. Our friends in Manila remained intensely curious about the situation in Indonesia. On most nights, we dined with politicians, journalists, or business people, all eager to know about their new neighbor to the south.

On a more serious note, I also had a few clandestine meetings with my counterpart in Army Intelligence. I praised the ef-

forts of Captain Espina in training the enthusiastic young recruits of the *Tentara Pelajar*. I refrained from mentioning my concerns over Ining's mental state. His emotional distress might be temporary, but any negative report from me might be entered into his permanent record and adversely affect his career.

We also discussed further assistance the Filipinos might provide, including supplying weapons. Until now, RI-002 had carried only items regarded by all as legitimate cargo (albeit sometimes with disputed ownership) such as our initial load of quinine. However, I knew that the military aspect of our struggle, the guerrilla raids on Dutch positions, were proving effective at rattling the authorities in Batavia and the Hague and boosting morale at home. We needed more weapons and ammunition. The Republic had already begun to purchase firearms at high cost from blatantly criminal gun-runners. I felt that sourcing weapons from the Philippines military through our covert liaison would be a much better option.

While we continued to enjoy the full official support of our sister republic, Bob discovered that his own government, or at least the representatives in Manila, had little interest in assisting or even acknowledging the existence of the Republic of Indonesia. Bob was humiliated when the American ambassador refused a request to meet with us. Bob sought to save face by mentioning that the local American community held the ambassador in contempt, calling him, in Bob's words, a "weak sister" whose subjects of conversation were limited to whiskey and horses. I suggested to Bob that perhaps the ambassador was simply being cautious, as any meeting with Indonesian officials, even low-ranking ones such as ourselves, might somehow affect the delicate negotiations taking place at Baguio. But Bob was not mollified, and the incident only reaffirmed his jaundiced view of American diplomats in Asia.

Bob endured one inconvenience in this social whirl: he had no suits appropriate for the more formal gatherings. Bob

had not yet received the Palm Beach suits he had ordered from Kansas six months previously. As Asians, Boedi and I were able to borrow dress shirts and jackets from friends in Manila when necessary, but Bob was compelled to send the one suit he had bought in Hong Kong for expensive dry cleaning between formal engagements.

Our mutual friend Tom Lee was amused when I told him of Bob's continuing sartorial saga. He said that this was typical of the petty annoyances suffered by expatriate Westerners in Asia. He suggested that Bob put a tracer on the suits, and hope for the best.

Tom and I were having dinner, our one opportunity to meet during my busy two weeks in Manila. It was also a chance for me to repay Tom for his previous kindness. During the weeks we were essentially penniless in Manila as we attempted to sell our cargo of quinine and vanilla, Tom Lee would often treat Boedi, Pang, and me to a decent meal, a welcome change from our monotonous diet of cheap curry. Now, in possession of an expense allowance adequate for the entire two weeks we would be in Manila, Tom would be my guest.

Tom was delighted to accept my dinner invitation, and reluctantly agreed to let me pick up the check. During the dinner, Tom expressed great interest about communist activity in the Republic. I could understand Tom's concern. The Philippines had been rocked by a communist-related insurrection within months of achieving independence, and left-wing guerrilla attacks were becoming frequent in Malaya. Normally, I would be guarded in expressing my personal opinions about such a subject. Especially now, in my role as support staff for a top-level delegation to an international conference, I was considered to be an official representative of the Republic of Indonesia. But Tom Lee was a close friend (not to mention a lawyer who is trained at keeping secrets) so I felt I could talk freely with him in private conversation.

I told him that communism was a concern for me as well. The communist and nationalist movements had grown in tandem in the Netherlands East Indies during the final years of colonial rule. To be sure, most nationalist theoreticians had harbored varying degrees of Marxist and even Stalinist sympathies. While socialist theory provided the foundation for the political and economic guidelines needed to create an independent Indonesia where all would prosper, our senior leaders insisted that there was no role in our revolution for doctrinaire communism.

But I worried that a significant number of military officers had communist leanings. In this I would include some of my erstwhile superiors in the Army, which I had joined after the disbanding of Pasukan T. In the propaganda section, where I had held the rather inflated rank of Lieutenant Colonel, my duties included disseminating information that I felt to be misleading or simply untrue, and obviously intended to serve the interests of the international communist movement over our own nationalist cause. My dissatisfaction led to me leaving the Army and accepting Suryadarma's offer of a commission in the Air Force.

Tom told me that, in his opinion, his own government was not paying sufficient attention to communist activity in Southeast Asia. Their focus was on the nations of eastern Europe that been absorbed under Soviet Union hegemony in the aftermath of the war. I assured Tom that, at least in the case of Indonesia, his government need not be overly concerned. Indonesians are an inherently moderate, conservative people, and most of us are not swayed by extreme ideologies. If left to our own devices, we would prefer to take the middle road and join the community of free nations.

A few days before our scheduled return to Jogjakarta, Boedi burst into our rented room waving that day's edition of a Manila newspaper. A report stated that our colleagues Halim Perdanakusuma and Iswahyudi, whom we had flown to Bangkok

the previous month, had crashed on a beach on the west coast of Malaya. They had succeeded in purchasing an Avro-Anson, which was given the registration RI-003. They were flying it back to Sumatra when the crash occurred.

The investigators scoured the wreckage for guns and other contraband, but found only household items such as dinner plates. This poignant detail, for me, defines the nature of our struggle. Halim and Iswahyudi were both young men who had planned to marry on their return to Jogjakarta. The Dutch portrayed us as contraband runners and opportunistic criminals. But these particular blockade runners were only smuggling in household essentials in scarce supply in blockaded Java. In our culture, a man should not marry unless he can set up a suitable household for his family. These two pilots, now national heroes, were only trying to begin married life with some small measure of dignity.

The untimely demise of two of our best aviators was not the only tragedy I experienced that week. A few nights later I accompanied Boedi to Makati airfield, where RI-002 was parked, to contact Air Force command in Jogjakarta through the on-board radio. Because of the distance involved, the communication was done through Morse Code. The republic had only the most rudimentary radio encryption; all transmissions were in plain language. With the Dutch (and anyone else) able to monitor the transmissions, conversations were nothing more than perfunctory confirmations that all was going according to schedule. Thus, I was surprised on this evening when Boedi remained on the radio for many minutes, tapping furiously on the code key. Finally, Boedi signed off, took off his headset, and turned to me, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Ining is dood, maar je broer is ook dood.” Ining is dead, and so is your brother.

I stood rigid in shock for a moment, then pressed Boedi for details. But he had nothing more to say. Jogjakarta could not supply details without revealing clues to Captain Espina's identity and mission. They only stated that my brother and a companion, referred to only by his nickname, Ining, had died in an accidental shooting.

With that meager amount of information, I went to Philippine Army Intelligence Headquarters and reported to Espina's superior, Major Primitivo San Augustin. The Major's reaction alternated between disbelief and rage. He queried me on details, which, of course, I was not able to provide. More officers arrived; at one point I had a dozen people shooting questions at me from all sides. Emotions rose, and I realized that I was not being treated as a military colleague, but as a criminal suspect. Or more accurately, an accomplice. The officers suspected that Ining had been assassinated by a communist agent: my brother.

Now I was being accused of the very thing I fled the Army to avoid. Fortunately, as a high-born Javanese, I had been trained in emotional self-control since childhood. I kept my composure and answered their questions in an even voice, until Major Primitivo accepted that the deaths had been some sort of accident. He let me go, but insisted that Ining's body be secretly repatriated to conceal the involvement of the Philippine military in our revolution.

On 17 December 1947 we flew the ECAFE delegates back to Jogjakarta. After my mission debriefing with Suryadarma, I sought out George Reneuker for more information about the death of Ining and my brother.

George had been on duty at Maguwo the night we left and had seen Ining run onto the tarmac as we started our takeoff roll. He noticed that Ining was highly agitated, and asked if there was a problem. Ining showed George a letter that he had intended to give to me to pass on to Major Primitivo. He explained that

he had been *en route* from his house on the outskirts of Jogja to Maguwo before he realized that he had left the letter on his desk. Ining had rushed back to retrieve it. Because of this delay, he reached the airfield moments too late.

Ining had seemed to be in real distress. George would be too busy to accompany Ining in the coming days, so he asked my brother to stay with him until he calmed down. The police and investigating doctor determined on the day of the accident my brother had been killed while attempting to wrestle a weapon away from Ining, and that Ining had then shot himself.

By the time we returned, the news of the murder/suicide was common knowledge throughout Jogjakarta. I worried that one of the many foreign journalists in Jogjakarta to interview the returning delegates might stumble onto the connection between Bob and Ining and seek out my friend for information. On my suggestion, Suryadarma arranged for Bob to be spirited off to Kaliurang for a week of relaxing in the highland air, out of sight of the foreigners in town.

Suryadarma fully intended to fulfill Major Primitivo's request to repatriate Ining's remains, but was reluctant to send Bob straight back to Manila. RI-002 remained the only dependable link between Jogjakarta, other Republican territories, and the rest of the world. Before letting Bob go, Suryadarma would clear up the backlog of missions on his plate.

After a week in the mountain resort, a relaxed and cheery Bob Freeberg returned to Jogjakarta. We flew two missions to other destinations in Sumatra. On 29 December, we were finally ready to fly poor Ining back home. It would be a roundabout journey; we would also carry twenty flight cadets to school in India, where they would qualify on twin-engine craft. As much as we valued Bob's contribution and admired him personally, we

needed to end our precarious dependence on him and his ram-shackle Dakota. Thus, Suryadarma was placing a high priority on developing a corps of pilots able to fly larger aircraft.

Our plan was to fly first to the freshwater port of Pekanbaru in Sumatra, where the cadets would take a smuggler's boat across the Malacca Strait to the mainland and then overland to India. Also on the flight would be three military officers (and their wives) who had been assigned to military bases in Pekanbaru. Shortly after noon, with the two dozen passengers, Ining in a black tin coffin, and two reserve tanks of fuel, a heavily laden RI-002 lumbered into the sky.

We had left our departure too late in the day, and arrived to find a solid overcast sky concealing Pekanbaru. We circled the location, hoping that the clouds might disperse sufficiently to locate the airfield, until only one hour of fuel remained. We then decided to fly on to nearby Singapore and land at Changi; at the time Singapore's military airfield and the base of a Royal Air Force transport squadron. The Republic had granted the squadron permission to use our airfields during operations to repatriate European internees in the weeks after the Japanese surrender. I hoped that the British would return the favor by allowing us to refuel and try again to land at Pekanbaru the following morning.

To conceal the identity of our deceased passenger, we concocted the plausible story that the coffin carried the body of "Achmad", a guerrilla fighter who had died in action. The Republic was granting the wish of "Achmad's" wealthy and influential family to return the remains for burial in their ancestral village near Pekanbaru.

The staff at Changi were indeed welcoming, assigning a suitable parking space and permitting us to purchase the fuel we needed to continue our mission. But Dutch diplomats in Singapore soon learned of our arrival and pressured the local civil

aviation authority to impound RI-002 as a blockade runner. The British refused to take sides in the dispute between Batavia and Jogjakarta. However, they did dispatch an inspector to Changi. This official arrived shortly before sunset, made a thorough inspection, then pulled Bob's flight clearance, citing doubts about the air-worthiness of the Dakota.

I must admit that he had a point. Even for a war-surplus aircraft, after six months of landings on badly maintained airstrips and other abuses, RI-002 was in pretty poor shape. The original military drab-green paint had been stripped off and the hull painted white, though with scratches visible everywhere. Both the rudder and elevator were damaged and crudely patched. Most of the original windows were gone, replaced with Plexiglas. Bob himself worried about the engines, which had not yet been replaced since the Dakota rolled out of the factory almost a decade before. The official instructed Bob to either dispose of the aircraft or effect repairs, and scheduled an evaluation flight in two week's time.

Our passengers elected to continue their journey by other means. They all took a train to the port town of Penang in Malaya. The officers boarded John Lie's notorious smuggling boat for the crossing to Medan, from where they set out on a grueling two-month march through the Sumatran rain forest to their assigned posts in Pekanbaru. The cadets continued overland through Siam and Burma, eventually reaching India. Meanwhile, Bob, Boedi, and I set to work to make the de-facto flagship of the Air Force of the Republic of Indonesia fit to fly.

FORGOTTEN HERO

JAKARTA — NEW YORK

June 1996 — July 1997

Flying is often described as hours of excruciating boredom punctuated by moments of gut-wrenching terror. “Fearless Freeberg” could deal with airborne emergencies with an eerie aplomb, but Bob also had his light side, and was adept at relieving the tedium of long flights and layovers on isolated airstrips. To pass the idle hours, he often entertained us with tales of life on the empty plains of Kansas, so different from mountainous, teeming Java.

Bob once told me of his brother Virgil's wish to carry on the farming tradition of the Freeberg family. With the help of the American Embassy in Jakarta, I obtained the address of a Virgil Freeberg in Bob's home town of Parsons, Kansas, and wrote to him. He was, in fact, Bobby's middle brother, but his answering letter contained only greetings and innocuous comments about his deceased elder brother. He did not reply to my second letter. That was my only direct contact with the Freeberg family.

In 1995, I met with Air Vice Marshall (Retired) Soedjono, who in 1956 had been Air Force Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Washington, D.C. That year, Suryadarma had dispatched him to

Parsons, Kansas, to deliver a sum of money to Bob's parents as a token of sympathy and condolence. Soedjono is blessed with a formidable memory, and remembered every detail of the conversation.

"We don't know anything about what happened to Bob," Soedjono told them. "What we have heard were only rumors. One rumor says that he was taken prisoner by the Dutch army and that he died in detention."

"If it is true then it is just like Bob," Mrs. Freeberg replied. "My son is very stubborn and he would defy any harsh treatment till the end."

Mrs. Freeberg told Soedjono that their friend Clyde Reed had visited them shortly after the disappearance. Reed, a journalist and progressive politician, had served a term as Kansas governor and two terms as a senator for the state, passing away in 1949. The family had appreciated his concern, but were puzzled by his behavior. Normally, Reed was relaxed and effusive while among old friends such as the Freebergs. But on that occasion he was guarded in his conversation, as though he knew something but would not tell them.

Mrs. Freeberg also told Soedjono that, in his letters, Bob had expressed great admiration for the revolution, of the courage of the soldiers and their willingness to sacrifice everything for freedom. She revealed that Bob had been encouraging his younger brother Paul to take advantage of his opportunity for a free university education under the GI Bill to study petroleum engineering. If, as he had planned, Bob became a major player in the post-independence aviation industry, he could arrange for Paul to be given a technical position in the oil industry, helping to build the economy of an independent Indonesia by exploiting the archipelago's massive oil reserves. Bob had even suggested that he build a retirement home for his parents, perhaps in the cool highlands north of Jogjakarta that he so loved.

One of the newspaper articles from the time of the disappearance stated that Bob was born in Pittsburg, Kansas. That was incorrect: Bob was born in McCune, Kansas and was raised in Parsons. However, the family did live for a brief period in nearby Pittsburg. On the chance that some members of the Freeberg clan still lived in that town, I again requested the assistance of the American Embassy in Jakarta. They gave me the address of the Pittsburg Public Library, along with the name of the head librarian, Carol Ann Robb. I wrote her a letter explaining my interest in the Freeberg family. She happened to be acquainted with a John Freeberg, and contacted him on my behalf. He was indeed a cousin of the Parsons Freebergs, but had little contact with Bob's side of the family.

In her letter of reply she enclosed, to my surprise and delight, copies of clippings from archives of the local newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Headlight*, relating to the disappearance of RI-002. One article stated that Salipada Pendatun, the Filipino senator who had been our lawyer when we fought the Dutch attempt to claim our cargo of quinine, had claimed to have received a telegram from Bob ten days after his disappearance. Acting on this message, he had contacted Senator Clyde Reed.

I was astonished at this new twist in the tale. Following our victory in the “Quinine Case” Pendatun had assumed the role of informal diplomatic liaison between the Philippines and Indonesia. But in December 1949, on the eve of the Dutch capitulation, Pendatun suddenly distanced himself from the Indonesian community in Manila and played no further role in relations between the two republics.

Pendatun might have turned his back on Indonesia for wholly unrelated reasons, or even, perhaps, in a fit of pique at being passed over as Ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia, a position for which he was certainly qualified. But the timing of this

abrupt reversal of sympathies seemed suspicious in light of further information I received about Senator Reed.

According to *The Pittsburgh Headlight*, Reed had repeatedly pressed the American consulate in Batavia to investigate the disappearance of RI-002. In a follow-up letter to Ms. Robb I asked where Senator Reed had donated his papers. She informed me that Reed had not elected to donate his papers to the state library, as was customary. Instead, he had instructed that all his papers be destroyed shortly before his death from pneumonia in 1949.

I continued my correspondence with the accommodating Ms. Robb, her generosity of spirit in volunteering assistance to a complete stranger evoking fond memories of her fellow Kansas native. She suggested I contact Gene DeGruson, Head of Special Collections of the Pittsburgh State University Library, who might know if any of Reed's papers had survived. I contacted DeGruson, who responded immediately, seemingly eager to investigate the case of this missing "Son of Parsons". He promised to begin his research in the archives of the Parsons town newspaper, *The Parsons Sun*. But in subsequent months I heard no further word from DeGruson, despite several letters of reminder.

DeGruson's sudden cessation of communication, Pendatun's abrupt about-face, and Reed's odd decision to destroy his papers might have been no more than coincidence. But there comes a point when coincidence and random chance cease to be plausible explanations. After almost a decade of investigation, I firmly believed that some thread connected the many mysteries I had uncovered. However, nothing in my research indicated what that connection might be.

One of the documents I received from the American government was a letter dated 17 November 1948 from Metropolitan Life, Bob's life insurance company, to the State Department, inquiring on behalf of Bob's parents about his death. The State Depart-

ment replied that, according to Dutch law (applicable in the case of a foreign national disappearing from Dutch territory), death could only be established one year after the individual was declared missing. That was true. Documents I received from the United States Veterans Administration showed that the government had followed that protocol and declared Bob as deceased in October 1949.

However, a private business might have had their own procedures, and might have come up with a different date. On the admittedly slim chance that their records differed from the official version, and that the discrepancy might provide a clue to his real fate, in 1996 I wrote to Metropolitan Life in New York for the details of Bob's insurance claim.

I received a reply from the company archivist, Daniel May, who wrote that my inquiry had been passed to the Corporate Records Management Department. Some months passed. I wrote again to Daniel May, who once more stated that my request was being handled by Corporate Records Management. More time passed without a word from Metropolitan Life.

In July 1997 I flew to Vancouver, Canada, to attend my son's wedding to a Canadian woman. I had bought a round-the-world ticket so I could visit friends in Europe on the return journey, and included a stopover in New York on the itinerary. During my day in New York, I attempted to contact Daniel May, hoping that I could perhaps meet him personally. But after trying the entire morning to get a message through, I was told he was too busy.

I put down the telephone and looked out the hotel window onto the bustling streets of Manhattan. Whether Bobby had been captured, detained, and killed, or had simply crashed into a remote mountain, now seemed irrelevant. I felt that the world had moved on, and that Bob Freeberg had become just another forgotten hero.

INTERLUDE IN MANILA

SINGAPORE — MANILA

January - March 1948

“In my opinion, the body is that of an Indonesian,” the Singapore medical examiner stated to the assembled British and Dutch officials. The Dutch had requested a court order to open the coffin of “Achmad the Guerrilla” to check for firearms or other contraband, which could have provided grounds for impounding RI-002 and jailing the crew. Fortunately, the British physician could not determine the difference between the decomposing remains of an Indonesian and those of a Filipino.

Accusing us of the old trick of smuggling contraband in a sealed coffin had been the final, desperate attempt by the Dutch to ground RI-002 by legal and diplomatic means. In Manila, Bangkok, and now Singapore, the Dutch had attempted to bully local authorities into complying with their demands to stop RI-002 from further blockade runs. But they had been thwarted at every turn by Asians exercising their newfound power to make decisions favorable to their own interests, not those of foreign masters.

After a fortnight of repairs, the civil aviation authorities in Singapore certified RI-002 as fit to carry cargo and crew, though not passengers. RI-002 took off from Changi during the wee

hours of 15 January 1948, ostensibly bound for Pekanbaru. Of course, we had no intention of landing in Sumatra. Our original passengers had made their own way to Pekanbaru weeks before; our task now was to deliver the remains of Captain Espina to his army unit in Manila. So, after about thirty minutes in the air, Bob radioed Singapore air-traffic control:

“This is RI-002. Pekanbaru in sight. Request to leave your frequency.”

Singapore replied: “RI-002. You're cleared to leave this frequency. Cheerio.”

Bob then did an aerial about-face and set course for Labuan. There we were treated in the usual way: no nasty questions, no problems with customs or immigration. We made no mention of “Achmad the Guerrilla”, instead giving the authorities the marginally more truthful story that we had come straight from Jogjakarta to repatriate the remains of a Filipino government observer who had passed away of sudden illness in Jogjakarta. After a quick refuel, we continued on to Manila.

Despite all efforts to maintain secrecy, Manila newspapers duly reported the funeral of Captain Ignacio Espina and the mysterious circumstances of his death and manner of repatriation. One editorial surmised that he had been killed when a firearms-smuggling operation had gone disastrously wrong.

The Dutch were not amused. Government archives in the Netherlands indicate that the repeated failures to have RI-002 permanently grounded, along with the revelation that we had blatantly lied about our cargo and flight plan, prompted Batavia to clamp down on all flights into Republican territory. Under the new protocols, any aircraft bound for Republican airspace which had not obtained clearance from Batavia before departure would be intercepted and forced to land at the nearest Dutch-controlled

airfield. In cases of non-compliance, deadly force was permitted. In these documents, Bob Freeberg was mentioned by name as the most notorious of the blockade runners.

Though the formal bureaucratic language used in these documents betrays no hint of emotion, I am certain that the colonial authorities regarded Bob's cavalier flaunting of their sovereign airspace as a personal affront. From then on, Bob was a marked man, for whom the sight of a patrolling Dutch Kittyhawk or Mustang fighter would be the harbinger of, at best, a long period in detention, and at worst, a fiery end in some rice field or forest. Fortunately, the Indonesian archipelago is vast, and one white-painted airplane is difficult to spot in the cloud-laden tropical sky. But even his preternatural flying skills and uncanny luck would not keep Bob The Best safe from the expert and dedicated Dutch fighter pilots forever.

For Bob, our third lengthy sojourn in Manila began with disappointment. A letter from his business partner in Singapore confirmed that their Southeastern Airlines venture had failed. Apparently, according to Bob, his partners had been so distracted by the many delights of expatriate life in Southeast Asia that neither had been willing to put in the time and effort required to build a viable business.

This disappointment was soon relieved by some truly welcome news. Bob Walters had not lodged an appeal against the previous month's court ruling granting Bob lawful possession of RI-002 within the specified time limit. Therefore, the ruling was now final and irrevocable.

At last, the flagship of the Air Force of the Republic of Indonesia was not in danger of being repossessed through a tawdry commercial dispute between two itinerant foreign aviators. Bob celebrated his victory in the style of any pilot: he refurbished his aircraft. The temporary revocation of Bob's airworthiness certifi-

cate in Singapore had driven home the need to get RI-002 in better condition. While the engines still ran adequately, Bob knew it was only a matter of time before they gave us trouble.

Boedi and I kept ourselves busy doing informal liaison work with interested parties in Manila. Events were rapidly unfolding in the south; many Filipinos were eager to be kept abreast of developments and to hear the views of Indonesians themselves.

A popular topic of conversation was the Renville Agreement ratified on 17 January 1948. While our delegates were making the technical case for the viability of an independent Indonesia in Baguio, the GOC continued to push for direct negotiations between Batavia and Jogjakarta. However, by this time the respective governments so distrusted the other side's intentions that they could not even agree on where to meet. To break the impasse, the United States sent a troop transport, the USS *Renville*, to Batavia. The *Renville* dropped anchor near the port, providing a neutral venue for the discussions.

The arrangement proved satisfactory, and a month of heated negotiation began. In the end, each side agreed to withdraw any forces to their respective sides of the Van Mook line separating Republican from Netherlands Indies territory in Java, and work toward the establishment of a federal nation consisting of the current Republic of Indonesia along with fifteen states set up by the Dutch, which comprised parts of Java and Sumatra and all of the islands to the east.

Shortly after the signing of the Renville Agreement, Tom and I met again. Tom said he was curious about my take on the new agreement, which was generating much controversy in the Republic. I told Tom that while most of my colleagues believed Renville to be an acceptable compromise, many had misgivings. The agreement was intended to provide a framework for the establishment of a federal state encompassing the entire archipelago. Though, at

least in theory, Renville granted considerable autonomy and self-determination to member states, in practice the agreement undercut the Republic right from the start. The agreement would give us the equivalent status to the various Dutch puppet states. We feared we would be outvoted in any critical decision.

Tom then told me he was becoming increasingly worried about Bob, and, by extension, me, since I spent so much of my time in the cockpit of RI-002. The Dutch were now literally gunning for Bob, but he could expect no help from the Americans. American diplomats regarded Bob as, at best, an annoyance, and at worst an impediment to America's interests. This is why the American ambassador in Manila had refused to meet Bob and me while the ECAFE delegates were in Baguio.

Tom told me that considering the instability in the region, with communist insurgencies in the French and British colonies, the United States would prefer that the Dutch maintain control over the chain of islands separating the Southeast Asian mainland from Australia. The American consulate in Batavia adhered to the Dutch view that the entire Republican government were opportunist extremists with no ability or desire to govern their own Republic, let alone the many thousands of islands of a future Indonesian nation. Tom said that the American diplomats had already been embarrassed by another young American, a journalist and political science graduate student who had driven a jeep across the Van Mook line from Batavia to Jogjakarta and was writing articles sympathetic to the Republicans and critical of the Dutch. Tom worried that powerful forces were gathering with the intention of vanquishing Bob from the skies.

As during our previous extended sojourn in Manila, we often passed time in Bob's apartment, chatting with his roommates and any other members of the Aviation Brotherhood who happened by.

It was during one of these occasions that I solidified my distrust of Bob's housemates. We all had had a fair amount to drink, and as usual for pilots in such a situation, talk turned to boasting about previous spine-tingling near-disasters or triumphant exploits in the sky. But this time, one of Bob's housemates (I will not reveal which one) boasted about shooting down his own despised wing commander during a mission in wartime Europe. I was shocked into silence, but all the other airmen shouted their boisterous approval.

In my culture, superior figures in the military, society, or politics are always afforded due respect. We may denigrate our senior officers or politicians in private conversation, but inflicting violence would be unthinkable. From this point, my mild disapproval of their feckless lifestyle changed to utter moral condemnation. This would have serious consequences in the next weeks, as our missions took us into uncharted, perilous territory.

In early March 1948, we finally received the long-delayed payment for the cargo of quinine and vanilla we had transported to Manila on the inaugural blockade run of RI-002. Salipada Pendatun thought this to be an event worthy of celebration, and so offered to host a small dinner party at his home.

On the evening of the party, Bob picked up Boedi and me in his jeep, now running like new. June, the Navy nurse he had been dating for a few months, was in the front passenger seat. For once, Bob was dressed in a manner appropriate for a young man taking a pretty girl to a party. As Boedi and I clambered into the back seat of the jeep, I complimented Bob on his smart new suit, perfectly fitted to his large frame.

He told me that this was one of several bespoke tropical suits he had ordered from a tailor in Manila. In recent months the cost of textiles had dropped significantly, so Bob thought that he should stock up now. Bob felt that the round of social engagements and press attention during the ECAFE conference, and his region-wide reputation as "Indonesia's One Man Air Force" indicated that he should, whenever not actually flying RI-002, look his best.

I asked Bob about the suits he had ordered from Kansas. He sighed and said that they must have been stolen, muttering a derogatory implication about the “flips”, as the expatriate Americans called their Filipino former colonial subjects and current hosts. Though Bob was acquainted with many Filipinos and valued their friendship, I also knew that he was often frustrated with their lax work ethic and casual attitude toward the truth. I know that some of my compatriots are prone to the same character traits, and hoped that they would not diminish Indonesians in Bob's eyes as well.

I, too, would be shopping for clothes. During the following days, Boedi and I were constantly on the move, purchasing medicines, automobile spare parts and other necessities with the proceeds of the quinine sale. And like Bob, I also set aside a budget for some nice shirts and trousers.

This was not frivolity. The items I bought were for fellow officers whose uniforms were all but falling off their bodies. After years of wartime occupation and the blockade, textiles were simply unavailable. Even President Sukarno was forced to fashion a woman's wool skirt brought from Australia into a pair of knee-length shorts. And our rank-and-file soldiers did wear rags: whatever scraps of clothing they could scrounge, endlessly sewn and patched. At times, Boedi and I felt slightly embarrassed when returning from an overseas mission wearing a newly purchased item of clothing. A few boxes of shirts and trousers for our colleagues would be the most practical show of appreciation for those attending to the crucial, thankless tasks back home.

Bob used most of his share from the quinine sale to pay off the bill for the replacement engines and other improvements to RI-002. Then we learned that while he may have been a hard-driving soldier of fortune, he still cherished his family ties—fur-

ther endearing him to Indonesian hearts. Though strapped for cash after paying off his debts, Bob set aside several thousand dollars for a gift to his parents in Kansas.

"Now I can buy my mother a car; a thing I wanted to do for a long time," he said, proudly showing us the cable and money order to a Kansas Oldsmobile dealer.

The following day, we departed for Jogjakarta. As we accelerated down the runway, I felt an unfamiliar sensation of exultation. We were returning to Jogjakarta with a full load of critical supplies in a refurbished blockade runner piloted by the undisputed legal owner. I looked forward to a new, glorious chapter in our blockade-running adventures. I could not imagine that our most severe trials still lay before us.

BLACK FLIGHTS

JOGJAKARTA — BUKITTINGGI — MANILA

March — April 1948

In March 1948, with new engines on the wings, RI-002 returned to the service of the Republic of Indonesia. Now we had a second base of operations: the pretty mountain town of Bukittinggi in Sumatra. The birthplace of Vice President Muhammad Hatta, Bukittinggi boasted a long history of political independence—the loyalty of both the elite and the general populace to the Republic was not in question.

The city was also a sensible choice for logistical reasons. Situated halfway up the Bukit Barisan range running along the west coast of Sumatra, Bukittinggi was a short flight away from Singapore, Bangkok, or Songha. Bob himself was directly responsible for Bukittinggi becoming this unlikely aviation hub. The year before, during his CALI blockade run, Bob had dropped two army engineers who organized a labor gang to repair the runway.

Besides Bob, Bukittinggi played host to a number of the Aviation Brotherhood. One regular visitor was Richard Ralph Cobley, who had served in both the British Army and Australian Air Force during the war. He brought his amphibious Catalina to our service, eminently useful in a nation with many waterways but only a handful of airstrips.

I was both distrustful and somewhat amused by the colorful Mr. Cobley. Listening to him openly boast of his smuggling adventures, I could easily picture Cobley as one of the semi-piratical European traders of the previous century, expertly piloting their fast schooners to avoid British and Dutch naval patrols as they ferried contraband between clandestine trading posts.

In marked contrast to Cobley was another regular visitor, the American pilot Dave Fowler. As laconic and circumspect as Cobley was overbearing and reckless, Fowler was not a free-booting adventurer but a salaried employee. The two-week forced grounding of RI-002 in Singapore had underscored the perils of relying on one battered aircraft and overworked pilot as our sole communications channel with the rest of the world. In March, Vice President Hatta authorized a contract with Bangkok-based Pacific Overseas Air Service, POAS, to provide semi-regular air services between the Republic and Siam. With two heavy-lift cargo aircraft linking besieged Jogjakarta with the outside world, the Republic could devote more resources to guerrilla harassment of Dutch positions and the ongoing diplomatic struggles for international recognition.

The contract between the Republic and an aviation company legally established in Siam indicated that widespread formal recognition of the Republic of Indonesia might be within our grasp. The aviation authorities of The Philippines and Siam, along with the British colonial authorities in Burma, Singapore, and Labuan, sensibly placed a higher priority on commercial, not political, concerns by granting landing, refueling, and other rights to aircraft destined for Republican territory. When giving departure clearance for such a flight, controllers would dutifully inform the pilot that the Dutch required them to land at Batavia for customs and immigration clearance. Few complied,

though they maintained radio contact with the regional air-traffic control center in Singapore, as did Republican pilots flying between Jogjakarta and Bukittinggi.

This sent the Batavia government into paroxysms of annoyance. Protests to regional governments were met with the diplomatic equivalent of a shrug. When the issue was raised during discussions on the USS Renville, our side admonished the Dutch negotiators to “stop meddling in our internal affairs”.

One evening in Bukittinggi, I listened to Cobley accuse Bob of exaggerating his blood-curdling tales of blockade runs to scare others off his turf. If anything, Bob downplayed the real dangers caused by treacherous physical conditions and inadequate support facilities.

And far from amassing a fortune, Bob was often owed large sums. From the first mission to Manila, where he shared our meager meals of Madras curry while waiting to sell our quinine, Bob never complained about conditions or the lack of payment. No load was too heavy, no route too dangerous, for “the notorious Bob Freeberg” to refuse a mission.

Perhaps Cobley’s rant was partially fueled by envy. Because of his exceptional piloting skills, and his panache as he thumbed his nose at a major colonial power, Bob Freeberg stood head and shoulders above the rest of the Aviation Brotherhood. In press reports and in casual conversation, Bob was often described as a mercenary. In my opinion, this is incorrect. None of the Aviation Brotherhood were mercenaries in the formal sense of the term: someone who fights for a foreign power in exchange for money. On the other hand, many were borderline criminals who would fly any cargo or passenger for a fee, regardless of legal or ethical considerations.

Operating what was essentially an airborne truck or bus, Bob was completely legitimate in our eyes: a civilian supplier under contract to the military. RI-002 transported only bona fide goods:

agricultural commodities, automotive and radio spare parts, food and medicine. While the Dutch struggled to portray Bob as a lawless blockade runner, our victories against Dutch legal challenges in Manila, Bangkok, and Singapore proved that no one, besides the authorities in Batavia, considered Bob to be a criminal.

Nevertheless, Bob faced as much peril as any front-line infantryman. Starting in January 1948, RI-002 was on the hit list of Dutch air patrols with authorization to use deadly force. The risks we took to avoid those patrols: landings on rugged airfields in near darkness, flying with extra loads and through treacherous tropical weather, pushed Bob's extraordinary ability (and his equally extraordinary luck) to the limit.

Bob now faced even more risk as the precarious financial and security situation forced us to take desperate measures to survive as a nation. The intransigent attitude of officials in Batavia was a clear warning that Dutch troops might soon pour over the Van Mook line and overrun Republican territories in Java. Our leadership therefore decided to transfer most of our national assets to safer locations.

One of the Republic's most valuable assets was also the most controversial: ten tons of pure opium. Like the British in China, the Dutch colonial administration had supported a vigorous opium trade throughout the Nineteenth Century. As with essential commodities such as salt, tobacco, and sugar, the Dutch had maintained a monopoly on the opium trade. They dealt harshly with unlicensed traders to safeguard this lucrative source of domestic revenue.

The stockpile Bob was asked to relocate was a legacy of those days. The opium was truly a treasure: ten tons would be worth a fortune when processed into medicinal morphine. But the Republic did not have the facilities to produce pharmaceutical-grade morphine, and no licensed factory abroad would accept a

shipment from the still-unrecognized Republic of Indonesia. So, until the day our Republic formally joined the community of nations, our opium was considered to be a clandestine horde of a Class I narcotic in the hands of a criminal gang. Bob knew that he was running the real risk of life imprisonment as a major drug smuggler should RI-002 be intercepted while carrying a large quantity of this valuable cargo.

I began to worry about my friend. Bob was only twenty-seven, but seemed haggard, aged far beyond his years from the ceaseless demands of his work for the Republic, and his own personal financial and legal difficulties. His blond hair was already showing streaks of gray, and his once-ample frame had shrunk with dramatic loss of weight. Like his overworked and under-maintained Dakota, Bob was in dire need of repair.

Perhaps this unrelenting mental and physical strain contributed to our most serious disagreement. During one run to Manila, the Republican treasury gave me a small bag of precious gems to fund the purchase of side arms for the air group under my command. I did not tell Bob about the plan, and secreted the jewels in a hidden compartment of the Dakota's crew deck before passing through customs inspection. The contraband would be covertly retrieved that night by members of the Philippine Armed Forces Intelligence Branch, who would also be supplying the weapons I would bring back to Jogjakarta.

This plan had to be kept absolutely secret. After the incident with Captain Espina, both our governments took great pains to hide the continued support that Manila was giving to Jogjakarta. With the United States still taking the side of the Dutch, and the Philippines dependent on the United States, leaked evidence of clandestine cooperation between the two new Republics might have grave diplomatic consequences.

I decided that Bob should not be informed. Of course, I did not distrust my friend, but his housemates were another matter. I was convinced that they were scarcely more than criminals. I could not risk Bob unwittingly letting out the secret to his friends, who might easily pass it on to American diplomats or the press in exchange for money or favors.

But you cannot keep a secret from a captain. Bob returned to RI-002 the following morning and was instantly aware that someone had rummaged around his beloved Dakota the previous night. He angrily confronted me. I was forced to explain the presence of the jewels. However I did not wish to disparage his housemates to his face, so I invented another reason for keeping him in the dark.

“The jewels were entrusted to me by my government,” I said. “They are my sole responsibility. This has nothing to do with you.”

“Damn you, Muharto! It has everything to do with me! I’m the captain—responsible for whatever happens on my ship, whatever she carries. If you get caught, I also go to jail!”

24

BERSIAP

JAKARTA

April - May 1998

After my disappointing brush-off in New York, I abandoned my quest to solve the mystery of RI-002. It is said that while intelligence is the ability to learn, wisdom is the realization that some things can never be known. After almost a decade of investigation, I finally admitted to myself that the fate of Bob Freeberg might be such an unsolvable mystery.

Besides, I now had more pressing matters demanding my attention: the economic well-being of myself and my family. When I returned to Indonesia in July 1997, I found a nation in the midst of financial disaster, brought to its knees by the region-wide economic collapse triggered by currency speculators. That month, Indonesia's fragile rupiah began a precipitous slide from 2.500 to the US dollar into the five-digit range, before recovering to 8.000 to the dollar by February 1998. At the time, many sectors of Indonesian commerce were over-dependent on imported goods and services. With the plummeting of the rupiah, these inputs became too expensive to sustain normal business activities. A wave of shutdowns and bankruptcies (including the forced closures of under-capitalized banks) threw many Indonesians into severe financial distress.

Millions suffered as the price of basic necessities skyrocketed. Fortunately, wise investments and generous pensions remained sufficient to provide a comfortable life for Ani and myself, and none of my four children were among the tens of thousands of middle-class professionals who lost their jobs as whole industries collapsed. As the crisis deepened, I noticed bizarre parallels between modern Jakarta and revolutionary Jogjakarta. But there was one key difference. In 1948 Jogjakarta, everyone, from senior officials to farmers, suffered equally, subsisting on simple meals of rice and soy cake, wearing whatever items of apparel they could find, even if little more than rags. However, in 1998 Jakarta, life was unchanged at the highest levels of society. Many of the great Indonesian fortunes are based on petroleum, mining, or forestry—export commodities that generated skyrocketing revenues in rupiah terms as the currency collapsed. Even as millions descended into a desperate poverty, the elites maintained their opulent lifestyles, oblivious to a growing discontent.

During these months of turmoil I discreetly continued my spiritual practices. These pursuits were not intended to solve the puzzling mystery of RI-002 and other worldly matters. Ani disapproved of these activities as a “waste of time” and I had long honored her wishes. Now, however, my meditations and other activities had a practical purpose. As is customary for a Javanese gentleman of a certain age, I was preparing myself for the inevitable meeting with my creator.

However, I was plunged back into worldly affairs when I was invited to a wedding reception celebrating the union of two prominent families. I was acquainted with a significant portion of the three thousand guests at this top-tier gathering. As I circulated, I discovered that the two most popular topics of conversation were the rumors of previous escapades of the ostensibly virginal bride and the egregious corruption of President Soeharto’s family and friends.

Many of the older guests had served with former Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto, including one venerable gentleman who had participated in the fabled Dawn Raid of the first day of March 1949, two months after Dutch troops had invaded Jogjakarta and imprisoned most of the Republican government. Soeharto had skillfully infiltrated troops into occupied Jogjakarta, routing the few (thoroughly astounded) defenders. The troops held the city for six hours until mechanized reinforcements arrived, then vanished back into the hinterland. This demonstration that the Republic, even with our political leaders in detention, was still capable of mounting a disciplined and effective military action helped to garner increased international support, bringing us many giant steps closer to realizing our dream of uniting the entire archipelago as a sovereign nation.

Memories of his outstanding leadership during our struggle made the subsequent transformation into godfather to a gang of crony capitalists and paterfamilias of a rapacious brood all the more disheartening. A significant percentage of the wedding guests owed their position and prosperity, directly or indirectly, to Soeharto. In private conversation many of us refer to Soeharto as the “sultan”, a nod to absolute monarchies of the past where the ruler was the unquestioned authority who exerted total control over every aspect of society. In my opinion, Soeharto's system of government, the New Order, has more similarity to the colonial system of ruling through native elites. Like a Dutch governor-general dispensing the rights to tax and otherwise exploit the local inhabitants to provincial nobles, Soeharto granted commercial monopolies to trusted relatives and allies in a strategy to maintain social stability while promoting rapid economic growth in his fractious archipelago.

Unfortunately, since the functioning of the New Order system was based on blind obedience to the “sultan”, political or civil-society activity could be no more than a charade. The most

dismal example was the choreographed political theater that had played out a few weeks before the wedding, resulting in Soeharto's seventh five-year term as president. The Indonesian people had only theoretical input into the process. Soeharto was actually elected by the People's Consultative Assembly, or MPR, a body consisting of representatives of political parties, social organizations, and the military. In our political system, voting is considered to be an admission of defeat. Instead, we arrive at a consensus through discussion, as a group of neighbors might come to an agreement on practical village matters. This can be an exhausting process, and not free of coercion and veiled threats, but on this occasion no discussion was necessary. No other candidates had dared to challenge Soeharto, so he was chosen by acclamation.

My good friend Alex Kawilarang also attended. After we had both fulfilled our social obligations to the wedding party and those guests of our acquaintance, we retired to the open bar which had been set up in a hallway near a side door to the ballroom so that devout Muslim guests (who believe that their faith prohibits the consumption of alcoholic beverages) would not be offended by the sight of Christians like Alex or moderate Muslims like myself sampling the premium brands of cognac and spirits supplied by our generous host. There, out of earshot, we shared our scathing contempt for most of the guests filling the opulent ballroom.

Uneducated and uncivilized, often only a generation removed from the rice-field mud, they had achieved wealth and power through obeisances to the "sultan" rather than through their own ability or accomplishments.

Of course, not all are undeserving of their wealth. Some would have prospered even without Soeharto's royal patronage. Alex, for example, could have used his exceptional management skills to build a thriving business as Indonesia's economy boomed under the New Order government without recourse to high-level

favors. But that was not to be. Shortly after the transfer of sovereignty, Alex was given command of the eastern region of Indonesia, where KNIL troops remained active in defiance of the Dutch capitulation. Soeharto, then a lieutenant-colonel directly subordinate to Alex, was stationed in Makassar in Sulawesi. Alex flew to Makassar upon learning that Soeharto's troops had fled the city in response to a KNIL attack. Furious at the display of cowardice toward a rag-tag force of rogue troops, Alex confronted Soeharto and, according to legend, slapped him across the face in anger. Alex neither confirms nor denies this story: he has no clear memory of what he considers to have been a minor incident of reprimanding a subordinate for the substandard performance of his troops.

Soeharto, on the other hand, forgets nothing. Years later, as president he would refuse to approve a business deal that would have assured Alex and his family the comfortable life befitting such an honored son of the nation. However, Soeharto was generous enough to permit Alex's son to work as a well-paid executive for one of his own son's companies.

After trading stories of the venality or stupidity of certain other guests, we turned our discussion to a serious topic: the continuing round of on-campus student protests. The government and military were quick to condemn the students for their vocal protestations and calls for direct elections (or at least a credible challenge to Soeharto). But many of our generation were reluctant to fault the students for their enthusiasm. We still remembered the crucial role that courageous students had played at all stages of our struggle for independence and our early years of nationhood. From the coffee chats of medical students in Batavia that sparked the beginnings of national consciousness, the youth congress that called for "one nation, one people, one language", the teenage warriors of the revolution, and even the activist university students whose demonstrations helped bring Soeharto to

power in the Nineteen Sixties, Indonesian youth had been at the forefront of political change. Alex and I looked around the opulent ballroom, packed wall-to-wall with an over-privileged elite casually dismissing the passionate convictions of young people on the city streets, and wondered what the next months would bring.

Alex then asked a favor. A longtime acquaintance had approached him to seek assistance for his daughter, a university student, regarding some serious personal matter. Alex volunteered no details, other than cryptic comments that he could not become involved because of his “position”, and that my “Javanese mystic abilities” might be of some use. I was intrigued by my friend’s uncharacteristic reticence, and agreed to help in any way I could.

A few days afterward, a young woman appeared at my door. It was Maria, the daughter of the friend whom Alex had asked me to assist in such a mysterious fashion. Over tea, Ani, Maria, and I engaged in polite small talk. In this situation, where someone calls upon a person of greater age or higher social position, Javanese etiquette mandates that we make pleasant small talk until the host invites the guest to state the purpose of their visit. After a few minutes of pleasantries I did hint to Maria that she should get down to business. However, she continued to talk of inconsequential matters, genuinely reluctant to broach the subject of her concern. Finally, Ani adopted a forthright tone and told Maria to speak her mind.

Maria told us that she was worried about a friend, a student at another university, who had inexplicably vanished the previous week. As she described her friend, whose name was Aldi, it became clear that the young man in question was, in fact, her boyfriend. Like most young lovers, they met or communicated daily. Maria showed us what I understood to be a current fashion accessory, an electronic pager, explaining that she and Aldi used the device to communicate by short text messages, since they studied at different campuses and lived some distance apart.

However, Aldi had not sent her a message since the previous week, though she continued to “text” him, as she put it, several times each day. Maria also telephoned Aldi’s parents, who lived in another city. They told Maria that they had also not communicated with their son for more than a week. However, they assured her, this was not uncommon.

Many young Indonesian men are not averse to breaking off a relationship in this callous manner. I saw Ani draw a breath, preparing to inform Maria that she probably faced a spell of heartbreak. But before Ani could speak, Maria revealed that she had visited Aldi’s campus after several days of pager silence. One of Aldi’s instructors told her that he had been absent from the campus since the day the messages to Maria had abruptly ceased. Furthermore, she learned that two of his friends had also vanished. Like Aldi, they were organizers of student protests. Ani and I looked at Maria’s pretty face, now clouded with concern, and realized that this was far more serious than a teenage romance gone bad. In all probability, Aldi had been disappeared.

Maria was in obvious distress, so Ani invited her to join us for a light meal. As we ate, Ani encouraged Maria to talk about her career plans, a ploy intended to take her mind from her boyfriend’s unknown fate. Maria told us that she was an avid reader, and believed that widespread literacy is the best hope of the Indonesian people. To this end, she was pursuing a degree in library science and historical documentation. Maria had just been accepted as an intern at the National Library, assisting a visiting foreign scholar who was compiling a comprehensive catalog of historical Javanese-language manuscripts. Maria told us that the scholar was teaching her to use a new resource, which she called the “Internet”, as an aid to their work.

As Maria struggled to explain to us such arcane matters as “news-group threads” and “keyword searches”, I saw in her eyes a

passionate conviction I had seldom witnessed since the early days of our Republic. Four decades ago in Jogjakarta, Maria might have taught school with one textbook and a few scraps of paper shared among all her pupils. Now, Maria and her generation have vastly more resources at their disposal, but I could see in her eyes and expression the same passion to effect change.

Maria's contagious enthusiasm encouraged me to relate my own adventures in the libraries and archives investigating the mystery of RI-002. I showed her my folders of photographs, newspaper clippings, and documents, including the declassified American dispatches suggesting that Bob had been secretly captured by the Dutch. I raised my eyes from the document binder and saw Maria staring at me, her face etched with lines of worry for her beloved. I thought of my own dear friend, perhaps decades ago similarly held incommunicado in a military prison. If Bob had been captured, he had almost certainly perished in detention. Maria and I shared, but did not voice, the fear that Aldi might meet the same dismal fate.

PILOTING A DESK

JOGJAKARTA

May 1948

In May 1948 I was reminded that the Air Force is a military organization, not a flying club, when I was transferred out of the RI-002 cockpit. In recognition of my blockade-running exploits (and the critical lack of capable administrators to manage the rapidly expanding force). I was promoted to Major and assigned to a desk in Maguwo.

Though my days as a dashing blockade runner were over, I looked forward to a new adventure: married life. Ani and I celebrated our *akhad nikah*, engagement ceremony, and our families set the wedding date for 24 October 1948. Like me, Ani is the offspring of a (now former) official in the colonial government. While our formal position is gone, our social status remains intact: our impending union called for an endless round of ritual functions to which I devoted most of my off-duty hours.

We were now an independent nation in large part because Soekarno believed that we should seize the opportunity presented by the surrender of the Japanese, rather than wait until all of the preparations to administer a sovereign nation had been completed. Soekarno wryly compared the diffidence of some nationalist leaders to leap into independence with that of a high official who

would not marry unless he could offer his wife a fully furnished brick house complete with an electric oven and spring bed. Soekarno exhorted his fellow leaders to follow the example of Marhaen, a farmer who dared take a bride though possessing only an earth-floored wooden hut containing a straw mat and a cooking pot.

I was fully prepared to follow Marhaen's example and usher Ani into a home furnished with only a cooking pot—except there were no pots to be found in all of Jogjakarta. Eighteen months into the blockade, even the most mundane domestic necessities were prohibitively expensive or simply unavailable. No longer able to shop freely in foreign ports, now I had to scrounge around like everyone else to set up a proper home for a married couple.

I was not alone in my privations. The population swelled as refugees continued to flood into Jogjakarta, transforming the Republican capital into a microcosm of the entire archipelago. An early evening walk down Jalan Malioboro, the main street of the town, flanked by government buildings and leading to the Sultan's palace, would present an intriguing mix of facial features, body types, dress, and language. Foreigners were well represented: European civilians, including Dutch journalists, freely came and went, along with a number of foreign sympathizers providing much-needed advice, technical skills, and overseas contacts.

A major provision of the Renville agreement, signed in March, was the relocation of the army's formidable Siliwangi Division, then stationed in Bandung, to Republican territory. Suddenly, our over-crowded, under-nourished capital had to contend with tens of thousands of new soldiers.

The Siliwangi soldiers camped outside of town comprised only a portion of armed men in Jogjakarta. The streets were filled with civilian militiamen, some carrying no more than a small knife, others with antique handguns in their waistbands. The fol-

lowers of Bung Tomo, the demagogue whose fiery calls to violence helped spark the massacre at Surabaya, were readily distinguishable: all promised not to cut their hair until Indonesia was free.

Many of the militias were composed of refugees from Dutch-controlled areas in the Outer Islands, demonstrating loyalty to a Republic that spread far beyond Java and Sumatra. However, we had mixed feelings about one set of “foreign” warriors: Dutch army soldiers who had deserted and joined our cause. All were recent conscripts, untrained and unwilling, who had endured years of wartime occupation only to be forced to abandon their homes and sail halfway around the globe to fight yet another war. Though each deserter meant one fewer enemy soldier, our ingrained traditions of national and military loyalty kept many of us from fully accepting these “traitors” into our hearts.

But this was not the case with some colonial-forces deserters. More than 600 soldiers in the British Indian Army, all ethnic Muslims, defected *en masse*, bringing their firearms, ammunition, and supplies with them. Conscripts recruited from the Dutch colonies of Suriname and Ghana also soon realized who they should be fighting for and defected to the Republic. After our independence was fully achieved, each defector from a colonized area was rewarded with Indonesian citizenship and granted either a parcel of land in a farming area or gainful employment in a town so they could build a life of freedom and dignity in the nation they had helped to bring into existence.

My promotion and relocation to headquarters was not without regret. Bob and I had not spoken of the incident with the gems I smuggled into Manila, and the atmosphere in the cockpit was decidedly frosty during my final missions with RI-002. My reassignment took away any opportunity I might have for a reconciliation. Bob spent little time in Jogjakarta, and even when he was there, I was too busy with the demands of my new job and my wedding-related social obligations to seek him out.



Petit Muharto and Ani
on their engagement in
May 1948

Though I lost one friend, I gained another. Alex Kawilarang was a Lieutenant Colonel commanding a crack Siliwangi brigade now stationed in Jogjakarta. I met Alex when he called on me at Maguwo, seeking my assistance in liaising with foreign blockade runners to organize arms shipments. Our colonial-school educations and other common interests led to long chats in *warung kopi* (open-air coffee stalls that are the traditional social gathering places for Indonesian villagers) about the progress and direction of our revolution.

Our revolution was far more than a straightforward struggle against an oppressive foreign regime. The Dutch strategy of divide-and-conquer had been used to encourage nobles to exploit the farmers in their ancestral territories and ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs to monopolize distribution channels at the expense of indigenous merchants. This had created deep divisions based on religion and ethnicity. Now, leaders of various factions exploited these divisions to gain influence, even as the moderate nationalists led by Soekarno and Hatta strove to unify the archipelago.

One such movement contributed to an unintended side-effect of the relocation of the Siliwangi Division to Jogjakarta. During the Japanese occupation, a charismatic mystic named Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwirjo took advantage of Japanese efforts to establish native militias to assemble his own corps of fearsome guerrillas. This group, who eventually called themselves the Hizbulah Mujahideen, became one of Indonesia's most effective and feared bands of freedom fighters, working closely with other militias and Siliwangi's own units to harass Dutch positions.

Kartosuwirjo rejected any form of accommodation with the Dutch infidels, and regarded the move to Jogjakarta as a betrayal. Hizbulah would continue to mount effective guerrilla raids, but their goal was no longer a sovereign nation of Indonesia. They were now fighting to establish their own dream: a medieval caliphate encompassing all Muslim-majority areas of Southeast Asia.

Alex was also concerned about the activities of socialist and communist organizations, who were rejecting any form of negotiation with the Dutch. We laughed when I told him of being accused of being a communist agent after the death of the unfortunate Ining, but we both knew that communists were making significant inroads into our military, including the Air Force.

We could only hope that Soekarno and Hatta would keep us on the middle road, navigating through the shoals of communism on one side and Islamism on the other, toward a future as a viable and stable independent state.



Soldiers from the Republican Army's Siliwangi Division in Jogjakarta June 1948

JAKARTA

June 1998

Honoring my promise to Ani to refrain from my spiritual practices, I sought information about Maria's missing lover by contacting a more worldly (though perhaps equally uncanny) being: a military intelligence officer of my long acquaintance. I gave him the name of Maria's friend, and he returned my call a few hours later to deny that the military had been in any way responsible for the disappearance of the young man. However, the manner in which he wrapped his denial in dense layers of allusion and circumlocution was, to my Javanese ears, clear confirmation that Aldi had been kidnapped by military operatives, but remained alive.

I telephoned Maria with this guardedly optimistic news, and invited her to visit us again. Both Ani and I enjoyed the company of this intelligent and vivacious young woman, and were more than willing to lend her emotional support during this difficult time. Maria did visit again a few days afterward, and we discussed my abandoned quest to solve the mystery of Bob Freeberg and RI-002. Maria suggested I expand my search beyond newspapers and government documents to other sources, such as personal memoirs. She offered to help by using the technical resources she

was now learning to master to identify books by Dutch politicians, military officers, and civilians who had lived in the Netherlands Indies or had visited during the immediate post-war years.

During the following weeks, Maria frequently appeared at our door bearing one or more obscure volumes, some of which she had tracked down in private libraries. Such was Maria's charm that she convinced these collectors to let her borrow some of their prized possessions. She also made some "undocumented loans" from the National Library reference collection.

I regarded the growing stack of books piled on the table beside my favorite reading chair. Even in retirement, the social and other demands on my time would prevent me from perusing these volumes in search of clues to the enduring mystery of RI-002. However, fate would soon provide me with all the time I needed.

On the evening of 12 May 1998, Ani and I watched in horror as a television newscaster burst into tears while reading a report that four students had been shot and killed during an anti-government demonstration that afternoon.

"Is this what has become of our revolution?" I thought. Fifty years ago, we were fighting and dying to build a nation where our children could live in freedom. Now the military operatives of that nation were shooting our grandchildren in the streets like dogs.

Following Indonesian custom, the fallen students were buried the following morning, the ceremonies attracting thousands of supporters. After the funerals, activists and well-wishers gathered on the campus of Trisakti University, scene of the previous day's tragic events. By mid-afternoon, however, hundreds of scruffy young men, representatives of the rural masses that middle-class Indonesians pity, despise, and fear, had gathered on adjacent roads, hurling rocks and bottles at the ranks of riot police near the campus.

This was the vanguard of a much larger force recruited from the hard-scrabble villages of western Java and southern Sumatra.

That night, scores of trucks transported these gangs to Jakarta, setting the stage for a horrific day of rape and pillage. By noon on 14 May, Jakarta was paralyzed. From my vantage point in a southern suburb I could see plumes of smoke rising from several downtown districts. Rioters and looters ran free until army troops finally appeared late in the afternoon. Throughout the evening, television stations broadcast searing images of burned-out stores and lines of looters, shirt-less for easy identification, carrying their stolen property as evidence as they were marched into detention.

Reports of marauding gangs in a neighboring suburb was enough to keep me at home during subsequent days. I turned to the pile of books beside my reading chair. My first choice was the memoir by an Indo woman of her experiences during the Japanese occupation. In doing so, I was taken back to a time of such horror that the events of past days seemed mild in comparison. But the horror was not of her time in a Japanese prison: the true horror only began after her release.

She and her children had been imprisoned in a camp in western Java; her husband in another, men-only camp. When the gates were thrown open after the Japanese surrender, she had left her children in the care of a fellow inmate and walked to her home in Bandung, which her family had owned for two generations. She was not sure where her husband had been imprisoned (or if he was even still alive), so she felt that her best option would be to wait at their house and hope he would appear.

At the house she was confronted by an Indonesian family who had taken up residence during their absence and had no intention of vacating the premises. Her only option was to return to the camp. There, with mounting anxiety, she sheltered with her children, relying on their despised Japanese guards to protect them from the newly armed and emboldened youth gangs who roamed the streets.

And so began a period in our history that, to this day, brings me great shame. The Dutch have a name for this time: “*Bersiap*” (“get ready”), from the rallying cry of the militias and roving bands of youths responsible for most of the violence. In most areas, the gangs, armed with *bambu runcing*, machetes and other basic weapons, sought revenge on local elites despised for their history of aiding and abetting Dutch exploitation. They also clashed with those Japanese troops who had remained in urban centers, and with native colonial army soldiers who were regrouping in expectation of the return of their Dutch officers.

Our leaders strove to control the growing anarchy, but appeals to reason and moderation were drowned out by a frenzied demagoguery. One day in October 1945, I sat in front of a radio set and listened, appalled, at the strident exhortations of a militia leader in Surabaya calling for violence against not only Dutch and British forces, but Eurasian, Chinese, and even Ambonese residents of the city. That irresponsible rabble-rousing would lead to the massacre of Surabaya, a tragic demonstration of the failure of the Republican leaders to control the forces sweeping the new nation.

The arrival of Dutch troops in significant numbers in early 1946 brought the situation under control. The establishment of a Republican capital in Jogjakarta helped to foster formal administrative structures in Republican territories in Java and Sumatra, curbing the excesses of the militias. In the rest of the archipelago, which had seen relatively little violence, local elites worked with the Dutch to keep order, even as many declared support for the Republic.

But the damage had been done. A thread running through the memoirs was the growing rift between the progressive factions calling for independence and those steadfastly opposed to ceding control over their beloved “emerald islands”. Reading

the memoirs, I was struck by a manifest and genuine love for Indonesia. For the Indos, those Dutch people born in the Indies, the colony was not a mining camp or oil field where they came only to exploit and make money—it was their home. Many families could trace their residence in the archipelago for generations: even a few to the days of the Spice Trade. I thought back to my school days. My teachers, for the most part, lived here permanently and had a profound love for the land, a love they tried to instill in us, the future leaders of the native population.

But that paternalistic love left no room for self-determination. The Dutch described their colonial subjects, not always out of earshot of Dutch-speaking natives such as myself, as “half child half devil”. In transforming a plantation colony into a modern nation we have clearly demonstrated that the myth of an “innocent, child-like native” was no more than a demeaning racist canard. But as I watched replays of footage of the burning buildings, and heard the stories of mass rapes and other atrocities, I wondered if the Indonesian people still harbored demons they needed to exorcise.

NOT READY FOR AIRPLANES

JOGJAKARTA — BUKITTINGGI

May – July 1948

By May 1948, after a year of non-stop operational abuse, RI-002 was falling apart. Dave Fowler, the pilot of the POAS Dakota that was providing a much-needed second reliable connection between the Republic and regional capitals in addition to the over-worked RI-002, told me of watching the port landing gear of the Dakota buckle and pitch a wing to the ground as Bob fired up the engines for takeoff from Bukittinggi. Bob had followed his usual practice of pulling the locking pins from the landing-gear hydraulics far earlier than recommended.

“Ninety-nine times out of a hundred you can get away with it,” Bob used to say. Obviously, this had been the hundredth time. No real damage had been done: Dakotas are the “pickup trucks” of the sky, able to withstand levels of abuse that would consign most other aircraft to a lengthy stay in a maintenance hangar. Using nothing but muscle power and piles of wooden beams, a gang of workmen righted the air frame. Bobby spent the rest of the day repairing the landing gear, then walked on the wing to confirm that the new warps and cracks on the skin of the wing did not pose a flight danger.

The following morning, Bob was ready for another try. However, a night of rain had turned the airstrip into a morass of mud. Dave



President Soekarno touring
Sumatra in RI-002 during
June 1948

Fowler told me how he shook his head in disbelief as RI-002 slipped along the sodden track, throwing up twin rooster tails of mud from the spinning wheels that exploded into mist from the propeller backwash. Perilously close to the end of the airstrip, the Dakota finally struggled skyward and disappeared into the leaden sky.

When Bob was contracted as the Republic's first dedicated aerial blockade runner, I had convinced Suryadarma to register his Dakota as RI-002 in order to reserve the call sign RI-001 for a future presidential airplane. A year later, we all realized that now was the time to paint that prestigious call sign on an actual aircraft, if only to provide a getaway vehicle for senior officials in the likely event of a Dutch invasion of Jogjakarta.

Soekarno knew that his best chance of raising sufficient funds to purchase the future RI-001 would be in Sumatra, the expansive island that comprised (outside of a few small Dutch enclaves) the bulk of the land area of the Republic. The Dutch blockade had not greatly affected the economy of the resource-rich island, and regional leaders had generously contributed to fund-raising efforts in the past, including the purchase of two Avro-Anson twin-engine aircraft.

This would be Soekarno's first journey outside of Java as president. The United Nations offered to supply an aircraft and crew so Soekarno and entourage could make the exhausting tour in comfort. A generous gesture, to be sure, though I am certain that the primary purpose was to provide an opportunity for their representatives to directly observe the level of support the Republic enjoyed in outlying areas.

I soon learned of the plan to raise money to purchase a presidential airplane, and casually mentioned it to Bambang Saptoadji during morning coffee on the Hotel Tugu terrace. He immediately declared his personal ambition to become captain of the future

RI-001. I kept my tongue, knowing that Bambang, though a natural aviator, was not even within shouting distance of gaining his captain's certificate for a Dakota.

Bambang felt he was in the shadow of his fellow aviator, Moeljono. They had been recruited within days of each other in early 1946, and had had similar opportunities for training and flight experience. But Bambang's career had been dogged by bad luck. For months now he had brooded about missing the raid on Ambarawa because of last-minute mechanical failure of his Hayabusa fighter, during which Moeljono had expertly piloted his Gunpei light bomber to land a direct hit on a warehouse in the port of Semarang. Now he had more reason to be envious of his fellow aviator.

Undeterred by the loss of the first Avro-Anson and the tragic deaths of Halim Perdanakusuma and Iswahyudi, Muhammad Hatta had successfully lobbied wealthy Sumatrans to purchase another twin-engine Avro Anson. This aircraft, designated RI-004, was delivered to Bukittinggi by a British pilot, Wade Palmer, in March 1948.

Suryadarma decided to relocate the craft to Maguwo. For this important task, he chose Moeljono, whose qualifications for flying a twin-engine aircraft, like Bambang, consisted only of a few lessons from Bob in the cockpit of RI-002. Nonetheless, Moeljono flew RI-004 to Jogjakarta without incident, to Bambang's great annoyance.

Bambang's frustration only increased when Suryadarma decided it was unwise to have the first batch of pilots, who were trained on vintage Japanese biplanes, operating such complex aircraft without a thorough technical grounding. Instead, he waited for the pilot cadets that Bob and I had flown to Singapore to return from flight school in India with twin-engine certification, while Bambang sat at a desk and fumed.

Bambang's only hope lay in racking up enough hours in the right-hand seat of RI-002 to gain twin-engine certification

through hands-on experience. But that in itself might not be sufficient. Bambang seemed to lack the sense (essential for the captain of any craft, air or sea) of taking full responsibility for every aspect of operations. Bambang only concerned himself with his specific duties as copilot, placing on Bob the added burden of organizing logistics on the ground.

For example, Bob's flight schedule for the opium runs involved leaving Maguwo at three a.m. and flying along the coasts of Java and Sumatra to Bukittinggi. With characteristic skill and courage, Bob navigated only by the dim outline of the Bukit Barisan mountains against the pre-dawn glow to the east in order to be on the ground at his destination before the Dutch began their dawn patrols. On the first such run after I had been transferred back to my desk, Bob had waited in the cockpit of RI-002 until well after dawn for Bambang and the other crew members. When they finally appeared, joking and quite unaware of their fault, Bob canceled the mission. As he stepped into the vehicle that would take him back to town, Bob turned and said: "You people are not ready for airplanes".

We all hoped that the Soekarno Tour might prove to the world (if not to the Dutch) that we were a cohesive political entity. Soekarno would be asking powerful leaders in lands a thousand kilometers from the capital in Jogjakarta to make a concrete contribution to the cause of independence by donating funds to buy a future RI-001. Ignoring the recent misadventure in Bukittinggi, President Soekarno demonstrated his mastery of the power of symbolism by insisting that he fly on RI-002 instead of the United Nations aircraft. He knew that arriving in provincial towns in an aircraft that clearly belonged to the Republic (albeit on a rental basis) would be a potent reminder of our commitment to achieve nationhood with our own resources and on our own terms.

In the end, though, Soekarno thought it best to fly from Java to Bukittinggi on the United Nations aircraft, as a portion of the flight path was over Dutch territory. Otherwise, he proudly flew on RI-002. For a whole month, Bob pushed his piloting skills to the limit as he surmounted the vagaries of unpredictable weather, rugged landscapes, and the deteriorating condition of his Dakota to fly into isolated settlements, while never losing sight of his responsibility to safeguard the Republican head of state.

On one occasion, Boedi told me later, Soekarno had insisted that Bob set down on a pot-holed, overgrown airfield near the village of an important religious leader. Bob flew low over the field, decided that even his exceptional skill and great good luck had limits, and declared that a landing would be too risky. Soekarno would not hear of it and demanded:

“I order you to land down there,” he said. “I am the president!”

“With all due respect, sir,” the always-polite Bob replied, “down there, indeed, you are the president. But up here, I'm the captain!”

Typically for Soekarno, at least in those years, this steadfast adherence to a captain's primary duty to protect his passengers and crew at all costs only increased Bob's stature in his eyes. Often, while delivering a speech on an airstrip, Soekarno would point to Bob, seated in the cockpit or resting in the shade under a wing. Soekarno would say that Bob Freeberg's willingness to support the struggle for freedom was proof that not all foreigners were colonial oppressors, and that the Republic of Indonesia had friends in the world.

The climax of the trip came in Kutaraja, now the city of Banda Aceh at the northern tip of Sumatra. One intriguing facet of Aceh culture is that the women will wear the entire wealth of the family in the form of gold necklaces and other jewelry. The wealth is perfectly secure, as in this staunchly conservative region women only venture out of the house when accompanied by at least one male relative. At the event, Soekarno declared that he would not eat his dinner until he had received sufficient funds to purchase RI-001. The diners all

regarded each other, not knowing how to begin but also not willing to disrespect their president by depriving him of his dinner. Then, one of the older women stood, detached a strand of her necklace, and placed it on the table in front of her. Others did the same. The ice broken, male attendees approached Soekarno and either gave cash or a solemn pledge to gift the money before he left. Soekarno smiled and tucked into his dinner. In appreciation, RI-001 would be named *Seulawah*, the Acehnese word meaning Golden Mountain.

Mission accomplished, Bob delivered President Soekarno and his entourage back to Bukittinggi, where they caught the United Nations aircraft back to Jogjakarta. Soekarno would never forget the services rendered to the new Indonesian republic by the young American pilot, in later years referring to him as: "That dear boy, our friend Bob Freeberg".

When Bob himself returned to Jogjakarta from Bukittinggi the following day, he was presented with a memo from Suryadarma outlining his next mission. Bob had already decided that the condition of RI-002, his own physical endurance, and perhaps even his luck, were stretched to the limit. He planned to put the sizable payment he expected for the Soekarno Tour to good use by taking RI-002 to Manila for a complete overhaul.

Boedi accompanied Bob to meet with Suryadarma. He told me later that the meeting did not go well. Suryadarma considered that granting the Dakota RI registration, though a legal fiction, entitled the Air Force commander to complete control over the aircraft. Bob did not share this view and demanded an immediate cash payment and a load to take to Manila.

Taken aback by this unprecedeted display of assertiveness, Suryadarma agreed to Bob's demands. Boedi told me that as Bob walked out of the office, Suryadarma looked at the American's broad back passing through the doorway and muttered imprecations, calling Bob a *londo*, a derogatory Javanese idiom for the despised Dutch colonialists.

SENSITIVE THINGS

JAKARTA

June – July 1998

In June 1988, with the victims of the May Riots buried and damaged buildings already being repaired or rebuilt, Indonesia was a nation in transition. Eight days after the riots, President Soeharto, his options exhausted, stepped down in favor of his vice-president and long-time protege B.J. Habibie. In the following weeks, the interim president, a western-educated technocrat, began the process of rolling back many of the excesses of the previous regime. As the military came under scrutiny and the press reveled in a new-found freedom, Indonesians celebrated the beginning of the *Zaman Reformasi*, the Era of Reform.

I seldom ventured out during those weeks, preferring to spend most days in my favorite reading chair, working my way through the ever-growing pile of books on the side table. Maria visited often, and never empty handed. Besides scouring libraries for books that might help me in my research, Maria kept me in mind during her frequent visits to second-hand bookstores. She would purchase books she judged to be relevant to my research and refuse to be reimbursed, no matter how much I insisted.

One afternoon I was engrossed in my reading when Maria appeared at the front door. Ani spoke to her for a moment, and

then both approached me: Maria's face radiant and Ani smiling broadly. Before I could rise from my chair to greet her, Maria dropped to her knees in front of me and took my right hand in hers, pressing my fingers to her forehead in the traditional Javanese expression of profound respect.

I extracted my hand from her grip and asked for an explanation. Maria replied that her missing boyfriend had been "reappeared" the previous day. I disclaimed any responsibility for the joyous conclusion to her weeks of uncertainty and agony. I knew from my own sources that many of the student organizers had returned to their families in relatively good shape. Others, however, were still missing, and would remain so to this day. None of the "reappeared" students, including Aldi, would reveal details about their experience.

The army was quick to blame rogue officers for the kidnappings. This was typical. Whenever the top brass do not want to take responsibility for human-rights abuses committed by their soldiers or military operations that have spun out of control, they put the blame on rogue officers acting outside of the chain of command, as though their inability to control subordinates was a perfectly valid excuse and not a damning admission of their own incompetence as senior commanders.

By coincidence, the book I had been reading when Maria arrived was *De Eenling*, The Lone Wolf, a memoir of the most notorious rogue operative in Indonesian history: Captain Raymond Pierre Paul Westerling. He is the *bete noir* of modern Indonesia. Every schoolchild learns about how Westerling massacred tens of thousands of brave soldiers and innocent civilians during our struggle for freedom. But he would never face justice for those atrocities. Westerling was smuggled out of Indonesia in January 1950, and the Dutch consistently refused to extradite him, or to put him on trial for war crimes. He died in 1987, unrepentant to the end.

Nicknamed Turk from a childhood spent in Istanbul as the son of a Greek mother married to an antiques dealer of Dutch ancestry, Westerling joined the Dutch Colonial Army after the Germans invaded The Netherlands, receiving officer training in England. Westerling did not see combat during the war itself, but quickly made up for his lost opportunities when he landed in Sumatra in September 1945, as part of a reconnaissance mission to investigate and report on conditions in the former colony. There, he witnessed some of the most brutal atrocities of the *Bersiap* period. The roving militias in the large port city of Medan had been especially brutal in the weeks after the revolution. As in other regions, the gangs targeted the Dutch colonials recently released from Japanese internment camps. In Medan, however, they also terrorized members of the local nobility, who were perceived as having oppressively exploited the common people for generations in the near-slavery conditions of rubber and coffee plantations. To Westerling, this persecution of both Europeans and Indonesians indicated simple mob-driven anarchy, not a political revolution with widespread popular support.

In 1946, Captain Westerling was assigned to Sulawesi, where the semi-piratical Bugis seafarers hailing from the southern portion of the island had emerged as a disciplined and highly effective guerrilla force. After mounting a surprise attack on a military facility, the guerrillas would disperse into scores of rural settlements, where they would hide in plain sight, indistinguishable from the fierce, life-toughened farmers and fisherman struggling to survive in their hard-scrabble villages.

Westerling quickly made a name for himself by developing the Westerling Method of counter-insurgency. He assembled an elite corps of commandos, all fiercely loyal to the charismatic Turk, who would enter a village and herd all residents into an open area, separating the women and children from the men. Wester-



Captain Raymond Westerling

ling would carry with him a list of suspected terrorists, gathered earlier through informants. He would call a name and, once identified, the man would be shot dead on the spot. Afterward, all present would have to swear on the Koran that they would not follow in the path of the terrorists.

Westerling's Special Forces were proficient in eliminating captives who were inconvenient or a potential threat. The method was to free the captives or allow them to urinate in the bushes. When they were ten meters away, the troops would open up with machine gun fire. This type of summary justice was called: "let them take a walk". I believe that a cousin of mine died at the hands of these notorious Special Troops in just this fashion.

My cousin, Samudro "Sam" Samadikoen, was only 19 and served as an adjutant to Dr. Soepomo, Minister of Youth Affairs at the time of the Second Dutch Aggression. When Madiun was overrun in December 1948, Dr. Soepomo happened to be in that town on ministerial business. He took to the mountains with a small entourage, including Sam. They were all unarmed and moved around disguised like ordinary villagers. On the slope of Mount Wilis they encountered soldiers who recognized them as educated people, not villagers, by their white, clean teeth and lack of callouses on the soles of their feet. They were all summarily shot.

Initially, Batavia turned a proverbial blind eye to the gory details of this strategy, as they did with similar massacres conducted by other units in Java and Sumatra. But as word leaked out, there were outraged calls for Westerling's own head from factions in his home country. Even those with little sympathy for the Republican cause took a dim view of wartime atrocities being committed by their own troops so soon after the bitter experience of Nazi occupation. Westerling was stripped of his command in November 1948 and the Butcher of Makassar was formally discharged in January 1949.

Westerling retired to a farm in the lush Parahyangan highlands south of Batavia. But this was not to be the end of the Westerling saga. He still enjoyed widespread respect among the officer corps and the rank and file of the colonial forces. More importantly, he had an especially close relationship with the commander of the colonial army, General Simon Hendrick Spoor.

General Spoor had served with distinction in the colonial military for two decades, interspersed with a period of teaching at the Dutch military academy in the Netherlands. During the Japanese occupation he had served as information officer with the colonial government-in-exile in Australia. Spoor took command of KNIL when the Dutch returned in force in early 1946. With his long experience in the East Indies and unrestricted access to military intelligence reports, Spoor knew that many senior Republican figures had shady or outright criminal backgrounds. Spoor became a staunch opponent of granting any measure of autonomy to the former colony, which brought him into conflict with pro-independence factions.

In *De Eenling*, Westerling wrote of a meeting on 7 February 1949, when Spoor asked for his opinion on the reaction of the KNIL officer corps if Spoor were to seize power. Westerling replied that all officers, with the exception of a few generals, would back him up and Westerling himself promised his full support.

Knowing Westerling's penchant for self-justification, I was tempted to dismiss this account as either misrepresentation or complete fantasy. Then I remembered a passage in a book I had read the previous week: the memoirs of a leader of an anti-independence faction of the Dutch parliament. The author states that while on a working visit to the East Indies in June 1947 with another influential politician opposed to the Indonesian revolution, they had met General Spoor. During the meeting, Spoor asked if they would support a military coup against the government in

the event Indonesia was granted full independence. Both politicians angrily rejected the suggestion. But these two independent reports of Spoor actively recruiting support for a coup, some eighteen months apart, suggested that the general had indeed been laying the groundwork for an attempt to seize power.

Several references I came across in my readings from the period suggest that General Spoor was closely monitoring the developing situation in postwar South Africa. The Afrikaaners, descendants of Dutch-speaking settlers who had migrated to South Africa in the 1700s, were a fiercely independent tribe with a profound emotional tie to what they considered to be their legitimate homeland. As did many Indos, the Afrikaners rejected any attempt by European politicians to grant autonomy to a native population that was, in their paternalistic view, ill-equipped to use it.

The election of the minority National Party in August 1948 would grant the Afrikaners total control of South Africa. They instituted a system of violent oppression of the native population unmatched in Indonesia even during the worst periods of the Cultivation System. The proposed federal solution for the East Indies would close the option of the Indos rising to power by democratic means. To keep the archipelago in the hands of European inhabitants, more radical measures would be required.

Reading these accounts, I came to the belated realization that I had been looking for clues to the mystery of Bob Freeberg in the wrong places. These past years I had been combing official archives, hoping to find the one overlooked item that would provide the key to solving the mystery. What if no smoking gun administrative memo or diplomatic dispatch existed, because the Dutch and American governments had been just as mystified by the disappearance of RI-002?

The overriding priority of a rogue operative is to erase the paper trail of his actions. If the disappearance of RI-002 had been

orchestrated in preparation for a coup attempt by Spoor and Westerling, then it is almost certain that incriminating written orders or records would have been destroyed.

As, perhaps, they had been. After the Dutch formally ceded sovereignty over the East Indies, the government and military commenced the myriad daunting tasks necessary to lay the foundations of a free nation. My own minor role was to work with a team to administer the transfer of air bases and other assets from the *Militaire Luchtvaart* to the Republic.

One day, a colleague complained bitterly about his task, which involved transferring operational reports from Karangendah air base in Sumatra. This was the base where Bob landed his CALI Dakota to prove that it could accommodate large aircraft. We did not have a chance to use the airstrip for such aircraft: the Dutch would take it over a few months afterward.

My colleague was annoyed because an entire week of flight logs from the base was missing. Considering the Dutch passion for keeping meticulous records, he feared that our own personnel had somehow lost or misplaced them. Because my spoken Dutch was superior to his, he asked me to request clarification from his Dutch counterparts.

When I did so the following week, I was met with only bafflement on their part. The Dutch team promised to check their own document-transfer records. Days later, they informed me that the flight logs had not been handed over to us, and could not be found. The only explanation they could offer was clerical error.

At the time, I did not connect this strange absence of records with the mystery of RI-002. We were all overtaken by the victorious and euphoric mood of realizing our long-cherished dream. We simply assumed that RI-002, which had so narrowly escaped disaster countless times, had finally been claimed by the forest. I would later learn that many thousands of documents (enough to fill a

fourteen-meter shelf, according to one estimate) were absent from the shipment of administration records to the Netherlands. I now wondered if the missing items had been intentionally destroyed.

Even if written documentation of Spoor's planned coup exists in some dark corner of Dutch government archives, it will probably never see the light of day. Given the dismal history of South Africa during the apartheid era, any suggestion that elements in the Dutch military had planned a similar solution for the Netherlands East Indies would create an uproar, and perhaps reignite anti-colonialist sentiment that should best be left buried in history.

In 1994, when Alex Kawilarang made his extended visit to the Netherlands for medical treatment, he visited Otto Ward, a prominent military historian. Alex mentioned my research into the disappearance of RI-002. Ward was quite familiar with the case, and they discussed the many theories that had been bandied about over the years. Ward doubted that the mystery would ever be solved, because, as he explained to Alex enigmatically:

“Certain sensitive things may never be revealed”.

SPITE THEIR FACE

JOGJAKARTA — MADIUN

July – September 1948

During the six weeks Bob would remain in Manila, other foreign pilots, particularly Dave Fowler and Richard Cobley, took over his blockade-running duties. As a contract pilot for POAS, Fowler provided a dependable link between Jogjakarta, Bukittinggi, and regional aviation centers. Nevertheless, Fowler was not an ideal solution to our communications problems. Fowler refused missions which would bring him close to Dutch positions, and strictly adhered to Dakota specifications regarding cargo weight and passenger capacity.

Suryadarma was constantly annoyed with what he considered to be Fowler's excess of caution. Suryadarma regarded our struggle as open warfare where peacetime practices of aviation safety need not apply. If Suryadarma was exasperated with Fowler's company-man attitude, he was infuriated with the cavalier conduct of the freelance pilots, who resisted his efforts to forge a rigid military hierarchy with an inviolable chain of command. Even in the case of aircraft carrying our still-fictitious RI registration, the pilots remained independent suppliers, treating each mission as a stand-alone contract. With our motley fleet of Japanese hand-me-downs inoperative, we had become entirely dependent on these foreign freebooters.

Of all the foreigners, RI-005 pilot Richard Cobley caused Suryadarma the most grief. A skilled aviator able to land his amphibious Catalina on little more than a fish pond, Cobley was not reluctant to accept the most hazardous assignments—for a price. Cobley openly boasted of the large profits he was making—money literally taken from the mouths of our undernourished citizens and soldiers—while his insensitivity to Asian culture and manners caused no end of needless offense. The brash Australian boasted of having a separate arrangement with the Minister of Finance. Accordingly, he said, he had no need to base himself at Maguwo, instead landing his Catalina on Lake Campurdarat in East Java, far from the oversight of military officials and bureaucrats in Jogjakarta.

Suryadarma's dissatisfaction with Cobley turned to outright alarm when we learned that during one mission he had attempted to renegotiate his fee in mid-flight. The Republican military officer in charge of the cargo was compelled to pull his sidearm, thus ending the discussion. It was obvious that neither Cobley's foolhardy recklessness nor Fowler's excessive caution were serving our revolution well. Each passing week without Bob only reminded us of the value of his unique contribution to our struggle.

Cobley also may have been one of the pilots who brought in cargoes we could have done without: communist leaders. During the crackdown on political activism in the 1930s, during which Soekarno and other nationalist leaders were arrested and exiled, most top members of Indonesian communist organizations opted to flee overseas. Now they were returning. Cobley was widely suspected of transporting at least one communist leader, primarily because his amphibious base at Lake Campurdarat in remote southeastern Java near Madiun, was ideal for these clandestine arrivals.

Madiun had been a hotbed of communist activity for two decades. The returning cadres were pleased to discover that the town remained a fertile ground for their propaganda. They re-

viled the nationalists, claiming that Soekarno and Hatta had collaborated with the Japanese. Working through leftist parties in Jogjakarta, the communists set about building popular support for open rebellion against the Republic of Indonesia.

On 15 August 1948 (to our great relief) RI-002 finally returned to Jogjakarta. An hour after Bob's arrival, I happened to walk past RI-002 as I crossed the parking apron en route to my office. When I spotted the aircraft where I had spent so much of the previous year, I was both wistful and apprehensive. I had not seen nor communicated with Bob since my transfer and promotion in May. However, Bob spotted me from the cockpit and leaned out the window to give me a cheerful greeting. I approached the Dakota and stood below the cockpit window. I was not sure whether or not to apologize to Bob about our disagreement, so instead I asked him about a subject dear to every pilot's heart: the condition of his aircraft. Bob grinned and pointed to the port-side wing. He told me that he had replaced the wing cracked in the accident in Bukittinggi with a new wing taken from a wartime C-47 that had been decommissioned and dismantled for parts. The paint job had been hurried and slipshod: I could still discern the faint outlines of the original US Air Force insignia on the lower surface of the wing. Bob then told me he had brought a bottle of good whiskey from Manila, and invited me to stop by the Hotel Merdeka on my way home that evening.

I arrived at the hotel well after dark to find Bob sitting at the dining table on the terrace of his ground-floor suite. He invited me to sit, then went into his room, emerging moments later with the bottle of whiskey and two glasses. We clicked glasses and I savored my first sip of whiskey since being re-assigned to a desk in Jogjakarta.

Bob's first words were his apology for the smuggled-gems incident. He explained that Boedi had taken it upon himself to restore our friendship by explaining my reasons for concealing

the fact that I was smuggling the gems. He explained about my reservations with his roommates, and my worries that someone might reveal that I was smuggling weapons into the Republic, even if only officers' sidearms.

Boedi had already informed Bob of my upcoming marriage, and he now had good news of his own. June had accepted his proposal. She was now back in the United States, and Bob intended to visit her (and his family in Kansas) that Christmas.

Bob poured us another shot, and then spoke to me of his personal feelings, hopes, and fears; something he had never done before. In marrying June, the unanswered question was : where would they live?

June might well insist that she and Bob build their married life somewhere in America. However, Bob now told me, he had few remaining contacts back home. During three years of wartime training and service, followed by another two years in Asia, Bob had lost track of friends, classmates, and colleagues who might help him establish himself in the domestic aviation industry before his meager savings ran out.

Even if June did agree to live in Asia, Bob's future would be uncertain. He was reluctant to return to contract piloting. He had quit CALI in 1947 because he was flying more hours for less money. Even then, his salary might be paid weeks late. Unlike Bob, many of the Aviation Brotherhood were happy to live a hand-to-mouth existence, spending their relatively meager paycheck in the bars of Manila, Singapore, or Bangkok before climbing back into the cockpit. But as a married man, Bob would be looking to build a future.

So far, none of Bob's various business ventures had come to fruition. Bob's contract with the Republic was his one remaining hope of achieving financial independence. However, since we had paid him only a fraction of our promised fees, he lacked sufficient operating capital for expansion of his business, or even to keep

RI-002 in top mechanical condition. Bob could only keep flying his grueling mission schedule hoping that his beloved Dakota, and his luck, would last until we had won our struggle for independence.

Bob resumed his routine of back-to-back missions, shuttling between Jogjakarta and Bukittinggi, with the occasional side trip to Singapore. However, Suryadarma had not forgiven Bob for what he considered to have been blatant insubordination at the end of the Soekarno Tour. During the first few days of September 1948, Suryadarma and Bob had another disagreement over some minor matter, as a result of which Suryadarma canceled Bob's allowance of aviation fuel, effectively grounding RI-002.

Dave Fowler had also crossed swords with Suryadarma over aviation fuel. However, Suryadarma had no real authority over Fowler, who was a POAS employee. POAS had been contracted by the civilian government, so Fowler's employer had resolved the matter with a trip up to Kaliurang and a genial chat with Vice President Hatta, who had authorized the commercial agreement. Though Soekarno made no secret of his high respect and considerable affection for the courteous and modest American who so visibly supported our struggle, protocol prevented Bob from going over Suryadarma's head with a similar visit to the presidential palace.

A few weeks later, I again met Bob for a few drinks on his terrace at the Hotel Merdeka. On this occasion, Dave Fowler joined us. He had flown in from Bangkok the previous evening, and had a disturbing tale to tell.

As a promotional gimmick, POAS had offered free flights into Jogjakarta for journalists "willing to take the risk". Several foreign correspondents did take up the offer. As the aircraft approached Java, Fowler felt uneasy. The aircraft was equipped with a radio capable of receiving military band communication, so Fowler asked his radio operator to monitor the *Militaire Luchtvaart* frequencies.

Minutes later, the operator picked up a strong signal, perhaps from an aircraft only kilometers away. Fowler killed all lights on the aircraft and peered into the sky from his cockpit side window, though he knew he had little chance of spotting an aircraft the size of a fighter in the night sky.

The Dutch-language radio chatter continued, ceased for several minutes, continued, then ceased again. Looking out the window again, Fowler believed he spotted the silhouette of an aircraft banking ninety degrees, the full wingspan easily discernible against moonlit clouds. This would be standard practice for a military fighter breaking off contact with a potential target. Fowler continued on his course, turning on his running lights only as he made his final approach into Jogjakarta.

We all toasted Dave's good fortune. Talk soon turned to the petty annoyances of the blockade runs, issues that concerned the pilots far more than the real possibility of being shot out of the sky.

Because of my fluency in English (and Dutch) and general familiarity with western manners, after a few drinks foreigners often will forget that they are in the company of an Indonesian. This was obviously the case when Bob and Dave complained bitterly about their dealings with Suryadarma, with Bob finally stating: "These people would cut off their nose to spite their face."

Bob immediately realized his indiscretion, and shot me a sheepish grin. I smiled and raised my hands, open palms outward, to signal that I had not taken offense. Nonetheless, I was disturbed. While Bob enjoyed a near-hero status from common Indonesians, only Soekarno had conveyed official gratitude for his contribution. During our years of struggle it was our custom to never express open appreciation to a fellow freedom fighter for assistance or a sacrifice, no matter how arduous or dangerous. It was our way of reminding ourselves that we acted from duty to the cause of freedom, not by personal choice.

Though I knew Bob was not concerned about recognition—in fact he would have been hugely embarrassed if presented with a medal or other symbolic gift of national gratitude—I was also aware that he did not take disrespect lightly. Suryadarma's petty insistence on treating Bob as an unruly subordinate, not as an independent supplier and professional peer, must have rankled the proud, self-reliant American farm boy.

In retrospect, I could see how the endless overwork and insufficient compensation Bob endured during his year of flying for Indonesia might have exhausted his legendary patience. Though nothing in Bob's character or background suggest that he might be capable of grand theft, a quarter-ton of gold is a lot of money to a lone foreigner, a stranger in a strange land facing physical peril as well as constant legal and financial difficulties. In my heart, I could understand the temptation to regard the gold as rightful due for his extraordinary services to the Republic. I could not deny the possibility, however remote, that our hired gun had, in fact, flown off into the sunset with the treasure.

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BETRAYAL IN BANTEN

JAKARTA

August – September 1998

By August 1998, memories of the cataclysmic events of the previous May had receded from our memories, and life in Jakarta returned to some semblance of normality. We once again ventured from the relative safety of our homes for purposes other than essential errands.

One evening, I attended a social function during which a troupe of *debus* mystics from Banten, a region of western Java, entertained guests with feats of invulnerability and other purported magical abilities. My own interest in the Javanese spiritual practices has led to a life-long fascination with *debus* practitioners. I first witnessed a demonstration of their uncanny powers when I was part of the team who sought out and liaised with freedom fighters in the west Java highlands in early 1949, during the final weeks of our struggle for independence. I watched, astonished, while a Bantenese guerrilla forcefully stabbed his leader's bare torso with a *keris*, the traditional wavy bladed dagger that can inflict fearsome injuries. But the blade did not penetrate the skin, though the pressure had made a visible mark. I gingerly touched the *keris* blade: it was indeed razor sharp.

While modern *debus* performances are no more than entertainment, a generation ago these displays of spiritual power were

used to underpin the authority of local tribal leaders, called *juwarah*. These *juwarah* commanded large and loyal followings, and many led quasi-criminal gangs, generating revenue through extortion and thuggery. The power wielded by the *juwarah*, combined with the fiercely independent spirit of the Bantenese, caused no end of socio-political headaches for Batavia and, later, for Jogjakarta. The independence of the Bantenese ensured that they would be among the first to join the Republic of Indonesia, but when Dutch columns swept out of Batavia to occupy strategic points along the north coast and the Parahyangan highlands in July 1947, they wisely avoided the Banten area, though it lay right on Batavia's western flank.

I suspect that in their more pessimistic moments our leaders would have preferred that the Dutch had taken over Banten. The Bantenese demanded that the officials appointed by Jogjakarta be recalled and replaced by *juwarah*, greatly complicating administration. While there were no overt demonstrations of disloyalty from the *juwarah*, this did not exclude the possibility of covert communication with the Dutch, which would have presented few difficulties given the free movement of goods and people over the demarcation line, only 40 kilometers from Serang, which separated Banten and Batavia.

I discovered just how free this flow of information might have been when Maria brought me yet another useful item of research. This book, *Life With Eri-San*, was the biography of General Dr. Erie Soedewo, the Republican Army territorial commander of Banten from 1948 until the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949. The author was his widow, Mang Eri Sudewo. The owner of the second-hand bookshop where Maria found the volume explained that he was acquainted with Mang Eri, and so had agreed to stock and promote her book. Maria told him of her interest in the story, and was given Mang Eri's contact information, which she passed on to me.

During the course of a lengthy telephone conversation with Mang Eri, I learned much of interest. I asked her specifically to recount all she could remember of the night the crates of gold were loaded onto RI-002. Mang Eri told me that she had clear memories of the incident. She noted that there had been no special precautions taken by the government in Banten to keep the existence and the destination of the crates of gold a secret. She had seen the crates of gold herself, and believed their existence to have been common knowledge.

In fact, she believed it entirely possible that the Dutch knew about the gold as well. Mang Eri had spent considerable time in the Dutch military archives in the Netherlands while researching her book. The Dutch historians were enthusiastic in their assistance, leading her to items that she could not have found on her own. Thus, she discovered memos and other communications detailing her late husband's secret activities as the military commander of the Republican region. The documents listed many of the confidential staff meetings he liked to call with no notice, and his unannounced inspection visits to outlying positions. Given this evidence of full knowledge of numerous clandestine activities, I believe it is safe to assume that the Dutch were aware of the quantity of gold stored in Serang.

Mang Eri also shared her thoughts on the general security situation at the time. She felt that the loyalty of some officers under her husband's command was doubtful, as subsequently many were purged for communist sympathies after independence.

This was not surprising. Menes, a small town in Banten, was the site of the first communist uprising in the East Indies in 1926. The colonial government brutally suppressed the rebellion, and the region subsequently remained quiet. However, many believed that the Bantenese continued to provide covert support to communist organizers elsewhere in Java.

That might have included some of my own colleagues in the Air Force. I knew at the time that certain key positions in Air Force headquarters were in the hands of officers who were either covert communist party members or active sympathizers. It is quite possible, I believe, that the Dutch were informed of both the presence of the gold in Serang, along with the flight schedule of RI-002, by officers of questionable loyalty looking to undermine the Republic and further an alternate agenda.

While Spoor might have been perfectly content to avail himself of intelligence supplied by communist sympathizers in Republican ranks, he was under no illusion that the communists could rule an independent Indonesia any better than the Republicans. Spoor would point to the perfidy of the communists, the lawlessness of the Banten juwarah and other regional strongmen, and the open rebellion of the Hizbulah Mujahideen as proof that the East Indies was ungovernable by any system other than the strict, paternal hand of the Dutch.

Westerling justified his atrocities by insisting that he was only trying to save the Indonesian people from the “Japanese collaborators” and “murderous terrorists” of the Republicans. Both Spoor and Westerling, as well as many other conservative military and civilian officials, were convinced that a fully autonomous Indonesia would be rent by internal conflict and face a constant threat of disintegration, to the peril of European, Chinese, and Eurasian residents.

Westerling claimed that by February 1949, Spoor had been well along in his plans for a coup. If so, he would have needed an untraceable source of financing for arms purchases, intelligence work, and support for civilian militias or other groups who might back up his own forces. In South Africa, the Afrikaaners had financed their rise to power partly through ready access to large amounts of a valuable, easily concealed, and marketable commodity: diamonds. But the bulky resources such as rubber, coffee,

and sugar that constituted most of the wealth of the Netherlands East Indies provided no such convenient currency. To fund his coup, Spoor would need a more compact treasure: gold.

The horde of gold in storage at Serang would have been ideal for his purpose. Spoor knew that the Republicans were systematically moving national assets to Bukittinggi using RI-002. If the Dakota were intercepted, forced to land, the cargo off-loaded, and then released (only to be shot down shortly thereafter) a highly placed conspirator with access to the flight logs for the region need only remove the relevant entries for RI-002 to vanish—along with the gold.

The gold carried on RI-002 could have provided a significant portion of the funds Spoor would have needed to mount a coup. At market prices prevailing in 1949, two hundred and fifty kilograms of gold bullion would be worth almost three hundred thousand American dollars. To get an idea of how much that would buy on the black market, I spoke to a friend who had assisted the Republic in the clandestine procurement of arms in Singapore. He replied that for a similar amount, the Republican military had purchased eighteen hundred rifles, three Oerlikon 20mm anti-aircraft guns, and a complete field hospital.

Westerling claims that Spoor had asked him about the possibility of purchasing arms on the black market in Singapore sometime in February 1949. Assuming that Spoor had had access to war booty confiscated in the so-called police actions of July 1947 and December 1948 as well as the RI-002 gold, Westerling could have outfitted, literally, a small army.

The unconfirmed reports of Bob and the crew in captivity are tantalizing indications that Spoor had ordered the interception of RI-002—with or without the knowledge of the colonial government. The failure to find Bob's dog tags in the RI-002 wreckage and

later reports of Bob being detained in Tanjung Pinang suggest that someone else (presumably co-pilot Bambang Saptoadjji) had been at the controls when the Dakota slammed into Mount Punggur.

This scenario is plausible considering that Spoor would not have allowed Bob to pilot RI-002 himself. The Dutch fighters would have to shoot down RI-002 over a location that was difficult to access to be confident that wreckage would not be discovered for years—or even decades, as was indeed the case. All knew of Bob's extraordinary piloting skills; there was a real possibility that before the Dakota reached a suitable area a sudden storm or other opportunity would allow Bob to elude the interceptors and reach Republican territory. Thus, they would have decided to keep Bob in detention after releasing the Indonesian crew. One more western gun-runner would not attract attention in a Dutch military prison.

Despite the plausibility of this scenario, I had no real evidence that the General and Westerling had done any more than discuss the possibility of a coup. Even if they had taken steps to implement their plans, they would not come to fruition, for here the story of General Spoor takes a strange turn. In his capacity as confidant and “eyes-on-the-ground”, Westerling met with Spoor late in February 1949 to discuss another matter: the mysterious death of a colonial army junior officer, Second Lieutenant R.C.I. Aernout. Spoor believed that the death was linked to reported arms sales to the Republic by corrupt colonial army officers. He asked Westerling to investigate.

Two months later, Spoor himself was dead, suffering a presumed heart attack after a working lunch during which he and his dining companions, two fellow officers, had been stricken with food poisoning. Dutch historian Jaap de Moor, Spoor's biographer, believes that Spoor had been weakened by the excessive demands of his duties and a penchant for micro-management. I know from my meetings with Dutch counterparts during the

handover of colonial aviation assets to the Republic that many believed Spoor to have been poisoned; assassinated by the corrupt officers he was investigating. But the deed might well have been done by officers loyal to their government, who saw this as the only way to stop an impending military coup. The dictatorial Spoor was widely detested, and Westerling himself admitted that a few generals would not have supported Spoor's plans.

Whatever the cause, Spoor's unexpected passing would have sealed Bob Freeberg's fate as well. If the coup had been successful, as de facto head of state Spoor would have been unassailable, and might even have contrived to use his granting of "amnesty" to the "notorious Bob Freeberg" to his political advantage. But with coup plans in disarray, the co-conspirators would have greatly feared the possibility of Bob Freeberg reappearing and telling his story. In all probability he met his untimely end sometime between May 1949 and the transfer of Glodok prison into Republican hands some months later. In either case, his remains are gone forever, and no headstone will ever remind the world of the young American who gave his life for our freedom.

LAST FLIGHT OF RI-002

JOGJAKARTA — BANTEN — MADIUN

September – October 1948

Bob was grounded for two weeks. During our regular breakfast on the Hotel Tugu terrace waiting for the train to Maguwo, Bambang would vent his frustration at being grounded along with Bob. Bambang's English-language skills had improved sufficiently that Boedi was no longer required to help Bob communicate during internal flights. Boedi had been reassigned, leaving Bambang the sole remaining member of the original RI-002 crew.

By the second week of September 1948, the backlog of missions compelled Suryadarma to restore Bob's fuel allowance. RI-002 made a number of routine flights to Republican territories, then on 17 September flew to Manila.

RI-002 returned to Jogjakarta two days afterward. Bob sent word that the cargo carried by RI-002 from Manila included several bottles of good whiskey, and invited me to drop by the Hotel Merdeka that evening.

At the hotel, I was surprised to meet Tom Lee and Cliff Baldwin. Tom offered no clear explanation of why he and Cliff had hopped on RI-002 for the flight to Jogjakarta. The only topic of discussion was the event that had transpired in the eastern Java town of Madiun the previous day. On 18 September the weeks of

clandestine work by the returned communist cadres came to fruition. They declared Madiun to be an independent “soviet republic” as militants swept the town, detaining and often summarily executing Republican civilian officials and military officers who refused to profess loyalty to the communists.

I had once told Tom of my childhood in Madiun, where my father had been a native official, so he asked my opinion of the situation. I remembered the passionate conviction of the young communist cadres, many of whom had been exiled to the dreaded Boven Digoel concentration camp in Dutch New Guinea. They seemed to have lost none of their firebrand passion, calling, bizarrely, for a revolution against a government that was itself in revolt against the Dutch. But I could not say whether their views of class struggle truly resonated among common people.

The next morning, a familiar face appeared in my office at Maguwo. It was Flight Lieutenant Santoso, the former commander of Karangendah air base where Bob had made a test landing at my request on the third CALI blockade run. The Dutch had overrun Karangendah six months afterward, during their first military aggression against the Republic. Santoso had made a strategic retreat to Jogjakarta, and was reassigned to command the air base at Madiun.

Now he was back in Jogjakarta, having narrowly escaped the mobs hunting down and murdering Republican officials. Suryadarma had assigned Santoso to RI-002 as reserve copilot, and so he had sought me out to ask about the aircraft and its now-legendary captain. I explained the mechanical quirks of the old Dakota, and how to deal with Bob’s forthright attitude. I also suggested (only partially in jest) that Santoso bring along ample reading material on his flights. I knew that Bambang was trying to build up his Dakota flight hours to qualify as captain and would be unlikely to relinquish the copilot seat for even the shortest period.

With Madiun under communist control, Republican leadership prepared for the worst, aware that the uprising would only support the Dutch contention that the Republic was unable to maintain peace and security in Java. They feared that a second military campaign to take over remaining Republican-held territories was just a matter of time, and that the government must urgently take immediate steps to ensure the Republic's survival.

Near the top of the priority list was the quarter-metric-ton of gold in temporary storage at Republican headquarters in Serang, the capital of Banten. Suryadarma ordered Dave Fowler to move this stockpile to Bukittinggi in preparation for safe storage in a sympathetic nation, probably India. Though this mission was well within the bounds of the agreement between POAS, the airline he flew for, and the Republic, Fowler refused. No amount of threats or entreaties from Suryadarma could change his mind.

Fowler had just received some disturbing news from his superior in POAS, who had also been on the dramatic flight transporting journalists to Jogjakarta. According to POAS sources, the fighters on his tail had requested instructions from their base, and the matter had been passed to General Spoor himself for a decision on whether to intercept the flight. Fortunately, the general had been informed that civilians were on board, and ordered the fighters to disengage.

Fowler was concerned that the Dutch had been so easily able to access his passenger manifest. He assumed that the gold he was now being asked to transport had been confiscated from a Dutch-owned mine sometime during the chaotic weeks after the Japanese surrender. If he were to encounter a Dutch patrol on this flight, the fighter pilots might be advised that Fowler's Dakota carried not innocent civilians, but stolen goods, and would act accordingly. Suryadarma had no choice but to call in Bob Freeberg.

The mission would be delayed for ten days by unfavorable weather in Banten. In the meantime, Bob undertook several short

flights to regional destinations. In my view, the most important of these missions was also the shortest: a brief hop to fly over Madiun and drop propaganda leaflets urging residents and freedom fighters to rally behind the Republican government.

As I had warned Santoso, Bambang did not let him anywhere near the copilot seat, though this easy flight over home territory would have been a good chance for Bob to evaluate his new crew member's skills. Instead, Santoso took a position by the rear door, which would remain open for the flight. As RI-002 swooped over the town and surrounding villages, Santoso balanced on his precarious perch and opened packages of leaflets, which fluttered out the open door.

On the return leg, Bob decided to have some fun. He told Santoso (now safely strapped to a seat in the crew cabin) and Bambang to pay full attention. Pointing to an imaginary Dutch fighter on the horizon, he dove earthward. As though flying a nimble Curen biplane, Bob pushed the lumbering Dakota through breathtaking tree-top maneuvers between the twin volcanic peaks of Merapi and Merbabu, thus proving, yet again, the appropriateness of our affectionate nickname: "Bob The Best".

During the rest of September, the situation in Madiun grew more worrisome. Reports emerged of brutal killings, including public beheadings, of community and religious leaders who were not necessarily members of the Republican administration.

On the final day of September 1948, the Republic dropped the hammer. A Siliwangi Division brigade was dispatched from Jogjakarta to retake the city, with the support of other troops marching from the east. The rebellion was quickly suppressed, and all but a handful of the rebel leaders captured.

As the army was mopping up in Madiun, RI-002 took off from Maguwo for Gorda airstrip in Banten. On board were Bob, Bambang Saptoadji, Santoso, Soemadi, a junior officer, Surjatman,

a sergeant, and Samaun Bakri, a senior Republican official responsible for the gold cargo. Turbulence over the Parahyangan highlands forced Bob to detour north, at one point flying almost in visual range of Batavia. But the Dakota soon re-entered Republican territory west of Tangerang and landed minutes later at Gorda, less than an hour before sunset. During that night, ten large wooden cases, each containing twenty-five kilograms of gold bullion from the mine at Cikotok, were loaded onto the aircraft.

The following morning, RI-002 departed Gorda. No suitable aviation fuel was available in Banten, so, as planned, RI-002 hopped eighty kilometers across the Sunda Strait to Branti airfield in Sumatra to refuel. At two o'clock on the afternoon of 1 October 1948, with full tanks and under clear skies, RI-002 departed Branti airstrip for Bengkulu, the final stop before Bukittinggi. RI-002 flew toward the west and the remote forests of Mount Punggur, where it would crash and lay, unseen, for three decades.

The disappearance of RI-002 cast a pall over what should have been the most joyous days of my life: the weeks of preparation for my wedding. My worries about Bob, Bambang, Santoso, and the others distracted me from the social and spiritual rituals I needed to undertake to mark this milestone in my life. I could only hope that Bob and his crew would suddenly walk out of the forest somewhere in south Sumatra: a possibility that became less likely with each passing day.

The Air Force had dispatched field teams to settlements along the presumed flight path, but could not divert the resources required for an intensive ground search of the rugged highlands between Branti and Bengkulu. Authorities in Batavia adamantly denied knowledge of the fate of RI-002. The colonial press revelled in vilifying Bob as an amoral soldier of fortune, who, in the words of one journalist, "made merry" with

the Republic's gold. This was to be expected, considering how Bob had thumbed his nose at Batavia by running their blockade with impunity for over a year.

I was distressed to learn that American officials also held their compatriot in low regard. Tom Lee, now stranded in Jogjakarta by the disappearance of his intended ride home, frequently contacted the American consulate in Batavia for assistance in arranging transportation back to Manila for Cliff and himself. As a senior government employee, he spoke informally with consular officials, and learned that the Americans were making no effort to investigate Bob's disappearance beyond the cursory visit to Palembang airfield. In fact, Tom told me, many of the American diplomats stationed in Batavia seemed to regard Bob as a thorn in their side, a constant annoyance upsetting their dealings with the Dutch. Tom confided, sadly, that the American officials might well be relieved that their problematic compatriot had vanished.

As my wedding date neared, I was compelled to set aside my concern over my friend's fate to concentrate on fulfilling my duties as a bridegroom. Javanese weddings can be daunting affairs, with many complex rituals that must be performed correctly before, during, and after the ceremony itself.

On my wedding day, my heart was gladdened when I saw Tom Lee at the reception. He wore only a casual shirt and slacks. When I greeted him he immediately apologized for his manner of dress. He explained that since he and Cliff had decided to accompany RI-002 on the flight to Jogjakarta on the spur of the moment, and stay only a short time, he had brought only one change of clothes.

Nevertheless, Tom was the best-dressed among us. The other guests wore only threadbare traditional costume, or ragged work clothing carefully scrubbed clean for the occasion. In normal times, their mode of dress would have been an intolerable breach of etiquette. An essential tenet of our traditional culture is *kera-*

pihan, or “tidiness”. We believe that proper dress and grooming demonstrates respect for our fellows, and is a reflection of our self-control and good breeding.

But no one was embarrassed by the shabby condition of their attire. We wore our rags with pride as a visible reminder of our dedication to the important cause we were fighting for. Even though our rallying cry was *merdeka atau mati*, freedom or death, we did, in fact, have other options. Our leaders did not fear that they would be summarily shot if they surrendered; the people did not expect to be herded into concentration camps. At any point, we could have just said enough is enough, accepted the Dutch proposal of a limited autonomy with a vague promise of full independence at an unspecified future date, and returned to our normal lives.

But we never did. We stoically endured the deprivations of the blockade until our eventual triumph was assured. Our shabby dress, normally a cause of deep shame, had become a symbol of great personal honor, for the greater humiliation would have been capitulation to our despised former colonial masters.

Our wedding ceremony proceeded to the satisfaction of all parties—an auspicious beginning to a half-century of loving and fulfilling partnership. But Ani and I would have to endure many trials before settling into domestic life, as we would discover scarcely two months into our marriage.

TWO PALEMBANGS

JAKARTA

October 1998

One evening in early October 1998, Alex Kawilarang and I sipped Dutch gin in our favorite retro-colonial restaurant as we watched television coverage of the student protests that had once again paralyzed daily life in the capital. These demonstrations, so far peaceful and orderly, were protesting a proposed national security law that would, among other measures, effectively outlaw the type of street demonstrations we were now watching. Alex and I shared a rueful laugh as we watched a government official blame the perennial scapegoat, communists, for the resurgence of student protests.

“If he is looking for communists he should start in the graveyard,” Alex said, “because that is the only place he will find them.”

Our dinner companion, Herman, shot Alex a quizzical glance. Herman was a good friend of Paul Verspoor. He was visiting Indonesia partly to indulge his interest in Dutch aviation history, so Alex had invited me to join them for dinner.

I explained to Herman that the accusation was intended to divert attention from the real concerns voiced by protesters. This was a time-honored tactic of Soeharto's now-defunct New Order government. Soeharto had engineered the ouster of President

Soekarno over a two-year period in the mid 1960s by blaming an attempted coup on the Indonesian Communist Party. Soeharto executed the purported leaders of the coup and called for a nationwide purge of those suspected of communist affiliation. Since, by that time, the Indonesian Communist Party was the largest in the world, with well over two million members, Soeharto set in motion a slaughter that ranks among the most horrific episodes of genocide in human history. When the guns were finally silenced and the knives and clubs wiped clean, perhaps a million Indonesians lay in secret mass graves.

During the following decades, whenever popular opposition to government policies became too outspoken, one or two political prisoners who had escaped immediate execution would see their decades-long detention end abruptly with a brief burst of national publicity followed by a date with the firing squad. But the pathetic spectacle of blaming a few broken old men for the nation's ills obscured the reality that, during our time of struggle, communism had indeed posed a real threat to our future as an independent, self-reliant nation.

Though the mass killings were, of course, indefensible, I firmly believe that the final elimination of communism as a political force in Indonesia was the most desirable outcome. Like the Hizbullah Mujahideen and their dream of a caliphate comprising all Muslim regions of Southeast Asia, communism is transnational, and purely national interests must take second place. As one of my fellow officers memorably stated during the Madiun rebellion:

“If Indonesia goes communist we will have yet another gang of foreigners in a distant land telling us how to live our lives.”

This was hardly an appropriate topic for a pleasant dinner with a foreign visitor, so Alex changed the subject by asking Herman about the discovery he had made while visiting airfields in Sumatra. Herman told us that he had stumbled upon the site of

a long-decommissioned airstrip near the town of Palembang. A quick glance at the map he had drawn confirmed that he had found Karangendah, the airstrip where Bob and I had made our test landing during the third CALI blockade run.

Karangendah had been under Republican control from the end of the war until August 1947, when the Dutch swept through the lowlands of Sumatra securing oil fields and ports. Local residents told Herman that during the period of Dutch control, which lasted until the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949, the official designation of the facility had been changed to Palembang II in order to differentiate it from the larger airstrip on the outskirts of that town, 60 kilometers to the northeast.

This intriguing item of information explained a nagging discrepancy in my theory about the fate of RI-002. News agencies reported that RI-002 had been intercepted and forced to land in Palembang. At Senator Clyde Reed's insistence, the American consulate in Batavia had sent a junior officer to Palembang to investigate. The officer reported that he had found no evidence of a recent landing by a large aircraft.

It stands to reason that the official had not been aware of the second Palembang airfield. Herman said that there were indications the Dutch had used the strip only as a base for small military aircraft, and that its existence was, more or less, a secret.

Given the lack of enthusiasm expressed by the American diplomats in Batavia for investigating the fate of Bob Freeberg, I doubt that anyone in the consulate would have bothered to ask the Dutch if there were any other airfields in the Palembang vicinity. Even if he had, the Dutch may not have admitted the existence of their military airfield at Karangendah.

Though this new evidence was compelling, I still had no definitive proof of my theory. The revelation about Palembang II was just one more in a seemingly endless procession of tantalizing

clues that ultimately led nowhere. However, as I bade farewell to Herman and thanked him for sharing his discovery, I could not guess that I had just embarked on the final stage of my decade-long quest for the truth about Bob Freeberg and RI-002.

A few days after my dinner with Alex and Herman, Maria paid us a visit, her first in some weeks. Maria told us that since the library is situated in the vicinity of two university campuses and near the junction of two major urban arteries, the round of student demonstrations, now daily occurrences involving many thousands of protesters, often resulted in complete traffic gridlock in all adjacent streets. On these occasions, Maria chose to stay in the library until the evening, long after the demonstrations had dispersed.

But those long hours passed quickly, for Maria was engaged in a massive task. Her internship with the foreign scholar was now completed, and the library had asked her to use her new skills to assist in cataloging the newspaper archives on the seventh floor. These archives were the most complete collection of historical newspapers in the nation: over a thousand titles, many dating back to the mid-Nineteenth Century. Only a fraction of this collection had been microfilmed. In addition, much of the material had been misfiled before being consolidated into this national repository. Maria's task was to ensure that the catalogs accurately reflected the material on the shelves.

Maria often worked alone. The seventh floor was closed to the public, and even accredited researchers could only request specific volumes to be extracted by the staff and brought out for reading. With the now-routine disruptions of private and public transport caused by the daily demonstrations, Maria's colleagues would often arrive late, leave early or both. Most researchers had simply decided to postpone their visits until life in Jakarta returned to normal.

With a conspiratorial smile, Maria invited me to take advantage of the situation. If I visited the library at a time when

Maria was the only staffer present, she could escort me into the stacks. I would be free to browse at will, perhaps finding a newspaper article solving the mystery misfiled in some obscure corner and not recorded in the catalog.

So one afternoon, I braved the demonstrations and drove into the city. To avoid the traffic gridlock I parked my vehicle at a supermarket two kilometers short of my destination and waved down an *ojek*, a motorcycle taxi, to cover the remaining distance. The young driver claimed to be an expert at avoiding the congested areas. He took me along a labyrinth of back alleys, some scarcely wider than the motorcycle handlebars. Emerging from one such alley I was surprised to find myself directly across the street from the library. I paid him a generous fee, then threaded my way through the stationary mass of automobiles clogging the street and entered the building.

I bypassed the microfilm repository in the public area and took the elevator to the top floor, where Maria waited. She gave me a pair of cotton gloves and instructed me on the safe handling of the fragile volumes. Then she pulled open the heavy doors and ushered me inside.

I shivered, both because of the sudden chill of the climate-controlled room and the anticipation of what I might find. Maria indicated the shelves containing newspapers published in Batavia in the post-war period and left me to browse. I soon forgot my research agenda and immersed myself in that bygone period. Advertisements for long-discontinued products and present-tense descriptions of unfolding events evoked vivid memories and powerful emotions. I became lost in my reminiscences.

Sometime later, Maria approached and said that she would be closing the archive in a half hour. A moment later I found a binder containing the 1948 editions of *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, which had been filed with editions from another decade. I

was quite familiar with the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*: it had been my favorite Dutch-language newspaper when living in Batavia attending medical school. Published from 1885 to 1957, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* had been the voice of the Indos, Dutch people born and raised in the Netherlands East Indies. The newspaper was often critical of the colonial government, and would slyly tweak the overly sensitive noses of the authorities while ostensibly toeing the line. In fact, the style was quintessentially Javanese: outwardly servile and accommodating while employing clever phrasing and sophisticated literary allusion to suggest a much-different, even subversive, meaning.

I leafed through the pages, finding nothing of interest until I opened to the front page of the 11 October 1948 edition. Below the fold was a headline about RI-002 being forced to land in Palembang. The story quoted sources stating that RI-002 had landed in Palembang with “a load of gold.”

I read the story, finding no information which I had not previously encountered in my decade of research. I then glanced at the accompanying photo. My heart raced and I let out an audible gasp. The grainy photograph was a head-on shot of a Dakota, bearing the RI-002 insignia above the nose, parked on an airfield and guarded by a single soldier. I turned the pages slowly, scrutinizing each article for possible information. The following edition contained an official denial by the colonial government of any knowledge of the whereabouts of the aircraft. No mention was made of the previous edition's photograph purporting to show RI-002 parked on a Dutch-controlled airfield.

I continued to turn pages. An article in the 15 October edition detailed the request by Senator Clyde Reed for the assistance of the American consulate in verifying the rumors that Bob was in Dutch detention. Subsequent editions reported that the on-site inspection by the American consular official produced



RI-002 under Dutch guard
on the military airfield at
Karangendah

no evidence that a Dakota had landed there recently. The Dutch then used that finding to support their own claims that they knew nothing of the fate of RI-002.

An article published on 22 October told of the independent efforts by Bob's parents to track down their son, working through a legal firm in Pittsburg, Kansas. Their lawyer stated that a "trustworthy person" had seen Bob in Dutch detention. The final two articles, dated 27 and 29 October, speculated about the fate of RI-002, suggesting that Bob had somehow absconded with the gold to points unknown. I had the strong feeling that the newspaper editors were up to their old tricks, and knew more than they let on. The final article closed with the phrase: "...we can expect the missing person will soon be found".

I returned to the photograph, studying it closely, trying to discern more indications that I was indeed looking at RI-002 parked on an airfield known to the Dutch as Palembang II, but which I knew as Karangendah. The low smudges in the background could well be the distant foothills of the Bukit Barisan. But without definitive proof that the photograph had not been taken earlier on some Republican field (perhaps with a soldier assigned to shoo away the curious locals) I could not be sure.

WESTERLING SWEEP

JOGJAKARTA — JAVA

December 1948 — June 1949

At dawn on 19 December 1948, Kitty Hawk fighters and Mitchell B-25 bombers appeared from the south, heading directly toward Maguwo air base. We had no time to react; the bombers destroyed our rag-tag armada even as our pilots ran toward our few serviceable aircraft.

Dutch paratroopers landed a few minutes later, swiftly overcoming our lightly armed airmen. Maguwo was in enemy hands by seven a.m. During the subsequent hours, Dakota transports landed troops who marched on Jogjakarta as mechanized infantry columns arrived from the north. By late afternoon, the Republic of Indonesia had been conquered.

Soekarno and Sjahrir fled to Kaliurang, where they joined Hatta and other senior Republican officials. As Dutch troops approached, the three civilian leaders chose to surrender. General Sudirman and other senior military commanders vigorously protested this decision, insisting that the civilian leaders follow them along the escape routes in the densely forested mountain slopes to guerrilla camps in the surrounding hinterland. However, I believe that our president and vice-president made a wise choice. They were diplomats and politicians with no experience in field op-

erations. Hiding in the mountain forests, unable to communicate with the outside world, they would have been more of a burden to their protectors than an effective means of propaganda.

On the other hand, as heads of state held in detention like common criminals, they were able to exploit their captivity for diplomatic leverage, precipitating the first of many public-relations disasters the Dutch would suffer during the coming months.

Some of our key military and civilian officials also meekly surrendered to the Dutch, though their logistical and managerial skills would have been useful in the field. This, to my mind, confirms my suspicion that their mission had been to pursue goals not aligned with the secular, democratic nationalism of the Republic.

Like these officers, I elected to stay in Jogjakarta, though I had no intention of surrendering. I had a new bride to protect. Ironically, Ani had to leap to my own defense the afternoon of the invasion. Shortly after nightfall Ani and I, along with many others, were detained by Dutch troops as we passed through the market on our way home.

“Oh dear!” I whispered to Ani, “It's a Westerling Sweep.”

This was bad news indeed. Speaking fluent Dutch, Ani argued with the sergeant, distracting attention while I surreptitiously chewed and swallowed my Air Force identification papers. The sergeant told Ani that she was free to go. However, I would be detained for interrogation. Adopting the imperious attitude that all high-born Javanese women can summon when necessary, Ani berated the sergeant.

“Very well,” she said, “but one of you must escort me home. It is not seemly for a married woman to be alone on the street at this hour!”

Trapped between duty and gallantry, the sergeant was stymied. He looked around helplessly. Then, another Dutch soldier

appeared. Dressed in khaki, he wore no insignia, but his confident manner, and the deference afforded him by the sergeant and troops, left no doubt as to who was in command.

Fearing an ambush, the presumed officer forbade the troops to enter a native area. Ani then demanded to know why I was being detained. The officer explained that the khaki pants I wore indicated I might be a rebel soldier.

“The nerve!” Ani retorted. “My husband is wearing those ugly things only because they are the only pants available in the market. Because of your blockade, we have to wear whatever rags we can find!”

I struggled to keep a grin off my face as the officer endured a tongue-lashing from this mere slip of a native girl. Finally, he let both of us go, and we hurried home to plan our next move.

The soldiers of the Siliwangi brigade elected to return to western Java, feeling they would be more effective and have greater value to the cause if staging guerrilla harassment of Dutch troops from their home territory. Ani and I decided to join them. Though married and under my protection, Ani felt that she should seek her father’s blessing for such an unheard of undertaking for the young daughter of an elite Javanese family.

Her father did agree, reluctantly, but insisted that Ani take her servant with her. This unfortunate teenage girl, whose family had served Ani’s for two centuries, was the brunt of jokes about her “feudal” status in our band of classless revolutionaries. It did not help that she once stumbled and fell, with a great clatter of pots and pans, as we passed only a hundred meters from a Dutch outpost.

When the brigade reached the town of Buitenzorg, now Bogor, in the northern foothills of the Parahyangan range, Ani and I left the group and continued to nearby Batavia. There, I worked with the Republican resistance fighters while, on the other side of the globe, our diplomats maintained relentless pressure at the

United Nations and other international forums. The Dutch aggression had unleashed a global wave of outrage. The United States, which had fought for an equitable solution as the neutral member of the Committee of Good Offices, was furious. An investigation had revealed that the cost of maintaining military actions in Indonesia was precisely equal to the amount the United States was donating, under the Marshall Plan, for reconstruction of war-ravaged infrastructure in the Netherlands itself. As calls intensified for the Dutch to fully withdraw from their former colony, the United Nations Security Council met to debate the final, definitive answer to the “Indonesia Question”.

In June 1949, for the second time in three years, I made a triumphant return by air into Jogjakarta after sneaking out by land. The first occasion, of course, was on the first CALI blockade run a few weeks after smuggling myself to Singapore by sea. Now, six months after our long march across Java, Ani and I rode a United Nations aircraft from the future capital of our free nation: now known as Jakarta.

Suryadarma again assigned me to a desk, but this time I executed these quotidian tasks with a full heart. The Air Force was taking over military aviation facilities from the Dutch. Our first task was to determine exactly what we had inherited from our former masters so we could apply the scarce resources in the most efficient manner.

My unit was responsible for transferring administrative records from colonial aviation authorities to our files. Never have I felt a more profound satisfaction from the simple act of pushing paper. Each inventory form or operational report that crossed my desk represented a part of our lives passing from our former masters into our own control; another brick in the foundation on which we would build our sovereign nation.

On 23 January 1950, scarcely three weeks after the Dutch formally handed over control of all the East Indies (except Dutch New Guinea) to the United States of Indonesia, Raymond Westerling led a band of armed men into Bandung. In the year since his discharge, Westerling (perhaps, until his death, with the assistance of General Spoor) had been assembling a covert armed faction from colonial army soldiers loyal to the Dutch, including a handful of European military personnel, and surprisingly, the Hizbul-lah Mujahideen guerrillas. They encountered almost no resistance as they entered the city: Republican soldiers were taking their triumphant and long-overdue break in their home villages. The rebels were lightly armed, and so headed to a warehouse where they expected to find a cache of arms and ammunition. They found only empty space as an alarm was sounded in surrounding villages. Republican guerrillas rushed back to the city and the rebels made a hasty retreat. Westerling fled the archipelago, the indigenous soldiers scattered, and the Hizbul-lah Mujahideen retreated into the hinterlands, where they would wage guerrilla war for the next decade in an attempt to realize their dream of establishing an Islamic Caliphate.

A few days afterward, I read newspaper reports of the incident, which included photographs of Westerling. I was struck by his strong resemblance to the commander of the soldiers who had detained Ani and me in Jogjakarta on the afternoon of the Dutch invasion. Westerling was not formally discharged from the military until January 1949; it was entirely possible that he had been Spoor's "eyes on the ground" in Jogjakarta. If my assumption is correct, it would be an ironic and satisfying footnote to our struggle that the Butcher of Makassar had been bested by a Jogja girl.

SHABBY DRESS

JAKARTA

October 1998

One silver lining of the economic and social clouds of the past year was the welcome relief from Jakarta's maddening traffic congestion. For the first time in decades, all parts of the city were easily accessible from any other—at least when there were no street protests. So, on Saturday 24 October 1998, the elderly veterans I had invited to our fiftieth wedding anniversary were able to make the trip to my home in the southern suburbs of the capital without undue convenience.

Their automobiles provided graphic evidence of the different paths we had taken in life since working shoulder-to-shoulder in a besieged town or braving Dutch fighter patrols in the skies. Several of my guests arrived in brand-new luxury sedans; others pulled up in older models of the ubiquitous Kijang family van. There were three motorcycles and, reminiscent of our days in Jogjakarta, an *onthel*, a sturdy bicycle of Dutch design still manufactured in great numbers in Java.

Ani and the house staff had prepared a simple meal reminiscent of our earliest days of revolution: *tahu*, *tempe*, *ikan teri*, *buntut*, though in servings far larger than our meals of a half-century before, and with a side selection of more substantial dishes and ceremonial delicacies appropriate to the occasion.

After dinner, my guests sat enthralled as I related the story of my decade-long quest to solve the mystery of RI-002, my tale illustrated with photocopies of newspaper clippings and official documents. My guests took particular interest in the published newspaper photograph purporting to show RI-002 on a Dutch airfield I had found in the newspaper archives the previous week.

We gathered around the photograph and peered at the blurry image. None of the guests, who, among them, had visited every air base in Indonesia, could verify that the location was Karangendah. That is not surprising. After independence, control of the Karangendah facility had not passed back to the Air Force. Instead, the Army had taken possession, and used the runway as a tank training ground. No one from the Air Force had set foot on Karangendah since 1947.

I brought out my magnifying class and we stared at the figure of the soldier. The man was unmistakably Indonesian, but the image was not sufficiently clear for us to discern whether he wore the uniform of a colonial-forces soldier or a Republican airman, as both were similar.

Then, one of the guests exclaimed: “*Aduh, prajurit itu rapih sekali!*” My word, that soldier is very neatly dressed!

We laughed, remembering the threadbare uniforms we wore with such pride a half-century before. Then I considered what that remark might signify.

If one of our soldiers had been so fortunate as to have a uniform with all components in good repair, he would have traded his good shirt or trousers for a comrade's ragged one, so each would have at least one item of decent clothing. It was improbable that a Republican soldier would have such a well-kept uniform at that late stage of our struggle. As final confirmation, we noted that the soldier was standing in the *op de plaats rust* “at ease” position used by the Dutch army, not in the Japanese-style *yasume* stance used by our soldiers at the time.

Hearing those words, I sat back in my chair, my heart both thrilled and at peace. After almost a decade, I had stumbled upon the solution to the mystery of Bob Freeberg and RI-002. Based on this revelation, and my decade of research, I could compile a complete narrative of events.

On the afternoon of 1 October 1948 RI-002 was intercepted by Dutch fighters lying in wait shortly after taking off from the refueling stop at Branti. The Dakota was escorted northward and forced to land at Karangendah airstrip, then known as Palembang II.

After a few days of detention in Karangendah, the Indonesian crew members were told that they were free to leave, as only their captain could be held legally responsible for the “illegal transport of gold”. In Bob's absence, Bambang Saptoadji took command, convincing Samaun Bakri that their best course of action was to return to Jogjakarta so Bakri could report the brazen theft of the gold directly to his president. For Bambang, of course, landing a Dakota right at Air Force headquarters would have been a triumph for all to witness; a feat far greater than Moeljono's solo flight of the twin-engine Avro Anson from Bukittinggi to Jogjakarta some months previously.

Several fighters trailed RI-002 southward from Palembang II. As the Dakota neared Mount Punggur, they approached and opened fire. Bambang attempted the evasion tactics Bob had demonstrated two weeks previously. Though the copilot was capable of controlling a Dakota during normal flight conditions, pushing the lumbering aircraft through contour-hugging turns in mountainous terrain far exceeded his ability. He sent RI-002 into a full-power stall, causing the battered old Dakota to tilt and pitch down, plowing into the densely forested mountain slope, where it would remain, undetected, for three decades.

While the Indonesian crew lay dead on Mount Punggur, Bob was moved to a military base in Palembang, then some weeks

later taken on board a Dutch warship to Tanjung Pinang. While being transferred from the ship, he managed to slip a note to a dock worker, who later passed it to an American suspected gunrunner who had just been released from the very prison where Bob awaited an unknown fate. From that prolific letter writer, who chronicled the drama, pathos, humor, and spirit of our struggle for freedom, the last known communication was a single word scrawled on a scrap of paper: "Freeberg".

EPILOGUE

BY EKO MUHATMA KARTODIRDJO

My father, Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo, passed away peacefully in March 2000, after a long, eventful, and blessed life. Though he did not live to see his manuscript published, the story of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 did not, as he had feared, follow him to his grave.

My father had known from the start that writing this book would not be easy. Petit Muharto had been a controversial figure in Indonesian society. Educated by the Dutch and openly elitist, he had participated in an American-supported rebellion against President Soekarno in the late 1950s. The rebellion failed, and our family was exiled to Malaysia until Soekarno was deposed by General Soeharto a decade later. Though sufficiently rehabilitated to find employment as a business executive negotiating public-works contracts with senior government officials, my father knew that he would be courting official disapproval by describing aspects of our struggle for independence that many would prefer to be forgotten.

In the official version of history mandated by Soeharto's New Order government, Indonesian independence had been attained solely through the bravery and sacrifice of Indonesians themselves. Foreigners played no part in this narrative. But my father's book argued that a foreigner, Bob Freeberg, had played a crucial and perhaps decisive role in our struggle; his own financial and physical sacrifices comparable to those of our brave boys on the battlefield.

My father feared that reaction to his book would be swift and savage. He therefore meticulously outlined the methodology and results of his researches, building his case in logical steps using only documented facts. As in an academic dissertation or legal brief, he avoided speculation or opinion, leaving no opportunity for attacks on his character and personal history. And true to his upper-class Javanese upbringing, my father offered a number of plausible alternative solutions to the mystery, so he could not be accused of defaming parties responsible for the disappearance and subsequent events.

To ensure that his book would be first analyzed and judged by the intellectual elite, and not the popular press, he wrote in English, a language he had spoken since childhood and that few Indonesians have mastered sufficiently for serious reading. Unfortunately, my father completed his manuscript just as the economic crisis of the late 1990s (which also drove away much of the nation's expatriate population) collapsed the market for English-language publications. By the time the market for such books had recovered, my father had passed on.

Nevertheless, by the middle of the decade, the story of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 had gained new life, in large part due to the efforts of two resourceful and energetic women on opposite sides of the globe. Tamalia Alisjahbana, a daughter of Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, a leading intellectual figure of Indonesia's founding generation, has been a friend of the Kartodirdjo family since childhood. As Executive Director of the National Archive Building Foundation, a prestigious historical society based in Jakarta, in June 2006 she hosted Donald Rumsfeld, at the time the U.S. Secretary of Defense and making an official visit to Indonesia, on a tour of the building's museum of national history. Knowing that Rumsfeld had been a Navy pilot and maintained a deep interest in military history, Tamalia related the story of Bob Free-

berg and RI-002. Rumsfeld was fascinated, and offered the assistance of his department to source Freeberg's wartime records and other related items of interest.

In Kansas, Bob Freeberg's home state, a member of the Freeberg clan was conducting her own investigations. Paul Freeberg had given his daughter Marsha Freeberg Bickham a collection of two hundred letters that his older brother had written to the family while in Asia. Like Petit Muharto, Marsha Bickham attempted to piece together the full story by requesting declassification of American diplomatic dispatches and intelligence reports. Working a decade later and through different channels, Bickham managed to find some documents that my father had missed. Though none of the evidence (all secondhand, single-source reports) satisfies the strict protocols for verification of historical records, the sheer volume of material led her to the plausible conclusion that Bob Freeberg had been captured by the Dutch and had died in detention.

In Jakarta, Tamalia Alisjahbana planned to mount a major exhibition about the story of Bob Freeberg at the National Archives Building, using photographs and other materials contributed by the American department of Defense, the Indonesian Air Force, the Kartodirdjo family, and many others. As part of the preparations for the exhibition, the US Embassy in Jakarta contacted the Freeberg family in Kansas. Marsha Bickham took this opportunity to formally request the assistance from her government to investigate the RI-002 mystery. This, however, presented a problem. While diplomatic officials had a mandate to publicize examples of good relations between Indonesia and America, they could not assign resources to investigating the historical actions of a private citizen in matters unrelated to security or other national interests. Nevertheless, some embassy staff members, notably Ariefin Pramono of the Library of Congress Representative Office in Jakarta, stepped forward. He devoted considerable effort during

his own time to investigating the mystery, including employing his diplomatic and academic credentials to request classified records from Dutch military archives. But even the material from this source, unavailable to other researchers, failed to yield definitive proof of whether Bob Freeberg had died on a mountainside in Sumatra or had met a more nefarious fate.

The week-long exhibition at the National Archives Building in May 2009 generated a brief burst of interest in the case, including a major article about Bob Freeberg and RI-002 in *The Smithsonian*, the magazine of the American national museum. However, another aim of the exhibition, pushing for recognition from the Indonesian government of the contribution of Bob Freeberg to the building of the Indonesian nation, has not been realized.

A few weeks after the exhibition I received an email message from Canadian writer Jeremy Allan, asking about an image I had posted on an aviation blog showing RI-002 (with my father on board) lifting off from the improvised runway laid on a remote beach in southwest Java. Further correspondence revealed, to my surprise and delight, that Jeremy, who had lived in Indonesia for decades, was the same writer who had interviewed my father at length about Bob Freeberg in 1986. My father had so approved of the resulting newspaper article that he showed it to all he met during subsequent days. However, he was appalled to discover that few were aware of the story of Bob Freeberg and his service to the Indonesian nation. That disappointing revelation had been a major factor that convinced my father that he must set the story of Bob Freeberg down on paper to ensure that the story of RI-002 was not lost to history.

With the publication of this book, the story of Bob Freeberg will forever be a part of the history of my nation. I also hope that this book will encourage young Indonesians to investigate this almost-forgotten chapter in the story of Indonesia, and, perhaps, find further evidence to confirm my father's solution to the mystery of Bob Freeberg and RI-002.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bringing one of the great untold stories of Indonesian history to print required years of effort and the contributions of a large number of dedicated people. The story about telling the story of Bob Freeberg and RI-002 began in 1986 when Sabam Siagian, then managing editor of *The Jakarta Post*, sent Jeremy Allan, then a foreign intern with the newspaper, to interview his old friend Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo about the early days of Indonesian aviation. The publication of the resultant article would be the first of several events encouraging Muharto to set pen to paper, ensuring that future generations of Indonesians would know of the remarkable role that Bob Freeberg had played in the founding of their nation.

During the decade Muharto worked on his manuscript, he benefited from the assistance of numerous friends and colleagues to track down witnesses and next-of-kin of RI-002 crew members. Helpful staff members of libraries in Indonesia and abroad guided Muharto through the labyrinthine periodical archives and restricted collections of out-of-print books about revolutionary times in Indonesia. Though this was not an officially sponsored investigation, the Indonesian Air Force opened their records to Muharto and offered support wherever possible. During later stages of preparing the original manuscript, the late Air Vice Marshall R. Surnario provided valuable editorial advice about the events from his perspective as a former senior Air Force commander.

Special note should be made of Pamela Hyde White, who, in her capacity as an official of the United States Information Service in Jakarta, and later back in the United States in her spare time, unlocked a vast American archive of classified historical documents relating to post-war Indonesia, providing many tantalizing clues to Bob Freeberg's eventual fate.

The passing of Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo in March 2000, and a subsequent failed attempt to publish the book in Jakarta, raised fears that the story of Bob Freeberg might indeed be lost to history. Then Tamalia Alisjahbana, a life-long friend of the Kartodirdjo family, single-handedly rekindled interest in the story of RI-002. In her capacity as Director of the prestigious National Archive Building Foundation, Tamalia began to gather artifacts relating to RI-002 and the role of aviation in the founding of Indonesia. In this effort she was ably assisted by William Tuchrello, regional representative for the US Library of Congress, along with Arifin Pramono and other members of his staff, who devoted considerable effort to assist Tamalia in obtaining exhibits and documents from American archives and authorities. The exhibition of these artifacts, *RI-002: Traces of a Friendship*, mounted in May 2009 in the National Archives Museum in Jakarta, generated significant coverage in the local press, and a feature article about Bob Freeberg in *The Smithsonian*, the official magazine of the national museum of the United States.

The exhibition and subsequent articles were also the catalyst that sparked the idea of publishing a book about the contribution of Bob Freeberg to the founding of the nation of Indonesia. The chance encounter of Petit Muharto's eldest son, Eko Muhatma Kartodirdjo, with Jeremy Allan quickly led to the commissioning of this book. As the project gained momentum, numerous acquaintances and contacts with an interest in aviation and history stepped forward with information and assistance. Lieutenant

Colonel Drs. Sudarno and his staff at the Indonesian Aviation Museum in Jogjakarta provided every opportunity to inspect and analyze the physical remnants of the RI-002 wreckage in their care.

The Freeberg family in the United States provided considerable assistance. Barbara Freeberg Meyer, who carries on the Freeberg aviation tradition as a participant in international kite competitions, and Donald Freeberg, who had actually met his uncle when a young boy, verified several anecdotes concerning Freeberg's youth in Kansas. Jiya Freeberg Sarma contributed transcriptions of letters sent by Freeberg to the family, while the diligent research efforts of Marsha Freeberg Bickham supplied information that supported many of Petit Muharto's conclusions.

Dutch author and publisher Bart Santema assisted research by sourcing and summarizing relevant Dutch-language material. Crucially, he also introduced Jeremy to Eugene Verspoor, a Dutch national resident in Bali whose father, Major General (Retired) Paul Verspoor, had been a fighter squadron commander based in Medan. Though Paul Verspoor had no direct knowledge of the fate of RI-002, his clear memories of aviation-related events during the struggle for Indonesian independence confirmed a number of important details.

The Indonesian media maintained a constant interest in the story. A two-part television documentary by Amanda Valani and her crew at Metro TV in March 2012 led to a number of people offering further information. Six months later, a major event organized by William Tuchrello and John Choi of @America, a US-sponsored cultural center in Jakarta, generated another flurry of interest and additional offers of information.

Jeremy Allan first learned of the Indonesian struggle for independence through encounters with the founding generation of Indonesian artists, including Soedjana Kerton, who had sketched

illustrations for *The Patriot*, a newspaper published in revolutionary Jogjakarta. His daughter, Tjandra Kerton, generously granted us permission to include some of these sketches in the book.

Several colleagues with no connection to the story made their own significant contributions. The manuscript underwent numerous revisions as new information was incorporated. At various stages over the years, John Moyle, Byron Black, Dean Tolhurst, Paul Clifford, Franklin Crum, Jessie Morgan, Joann Davida, Kelsey Schober, and Julien Espagne kindly donated time to close readings of the manuscript to ensure that the difficult and complex subject matter and sequences of events would be comprehensible to readers with little prior knowledge of Indonesian culture, geography, or history.

During the initial stages of the project, Jeremy's long-time friend and professional mentor Leonard Lueras provided connections with people interested in the Bob Freeberg story and contributed the creative guidance required to focus this epic, multi-faceted tale into a coherent narrative with wide appeal. Frank Morgan also graciously donated valuable material and moral support, as well as offering insights based on his uniquely broad and deep knowledge of Indonesian business, culture, law, and society.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo

Born in 1919 into the close-knit family of a colonial-era civil servant, Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo witnessed and in many cases participated in the seminal events of modern Indonesian history. Named, like his four siblings, after an instrument in the Javanese gamelan orchestra, Petit Muharto was a staunch proponent of both traditional social customs and values and the nationalist goal of creating a modern nation of Indonesia. During the course of an eventful life, Petit Muharto served his a nation as a school teacher, military officer, and diplomat. He and his family also spent many years in exile, a consequence of following his moral compass instead of the political winds of the day. Petit Muharto was eventually welcomed back into Indonesia and spent the last decades of his life as a corporate executive and then in comfortable retirement, during which time he undertook his investigations of the mysterious disappearance of his friend Bob Freeberg. Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo passed away peacefully in March 2000.

Jeremy Allan

Born in Vancouver, Canada in 1953, Jeremy Allan took up residence in Indonesia in 1980. Since that time he has followed eclectic career as an oil field surveyor, travel writer, television producer, magazine editor, advertising copywriter, and author. Through this time he has used his extensive familiarity with his adoptive nation's culture, society, and history to introduce the people and places of the Indonesian archipelago to a global readership through various media, including his two previous books, *Jakarta Jive* and *Bali Blues*. Jeremy Allan now devotes his time to assisting young Indonesians to polish their English language writing skills to international standard, so they can tell their own stories to the world.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INCOMING TELEGRAM

On 30 September 1948, American pilot Bobby Earl Freeberg fired up the twin engines of his war-surplus C-47 cargo airplane, designated RI-002, for a mission to transport 250 kilograms of gold bullion from Java to Sumatra in preparation for an expected Dutch invasion of Indonesian territory. RI-002 then vanished, the wreckage only found 30 years later in the remote Sumatra highlands.

NO. 1012, October 14, 5 p.m.

The mysterious disappearance of Bob Freeberg was the final, ironic twist in one of the most dramatic-and least-known-chapters in the story of Indonesia. For sixteen months, Bob Freeberg ran the Dutch blockade, flying in critical supplies such as medicines, and carrying out the diplomats and experts who would make the case for

Indonesian independence to the world. Senator Reed of Kansas and Robert Delson, 270 Broadway, New York, attorney Freeberg's parents,

Now, the story of Bob Freeberg is told by the Indonesian who knew him best. Air Force Captain Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo flew with Freeberg as official mission leader and (unofficial) copilot, until being promoted and reassigned to headquarters shortly before the tragic final flight.

One Man Air Force is the dramatic account of the birth of a nation, of two idealistic young men from opposite ends of the globe forging a close friendship, and a compelling tale of Petit Muharto's efforts in later life to solve the mystery of his friend's disappearance.

"What emerges from this story is two highly intelligent, courageous and stubborn men who were moved by injustice and willing to fight against it." — Tamalia Alisjahbana, *Independent Observer* 32 a.m.

"One Man Air Force is a fascinating tale of the bravery and ingenuity that attended Indonesia's birth. It recalls an era of heroic idealism that should always be cherished." — Michael Vatikiotis, author of *Blood and Silk*

"History, revolution, adventure, thriller, mystery, exotic tropical setting, dashing young pilot risking his life for an aspiring republic — what's not to like about One Man Air Force?" — Julia Suryakusuma, author of *Julia's Jihad*

whereabouts
when
knowledge concerning

from Tandjung Kesusang, south Sumatra, to Bankok, Dutch authorities

attempting

verification, Consulate General attempting

investigate further.

RECORDED

ONE MAN AIR FORCE

PETIT MUHARTO KARTODIRDO
WITH JEREMY ALLAN

