A C-47 cargo airplane, unmarked and the skin of the airframe clearly showing the abuse suffered in the war that had just ended, makes a low pass over a stretch of palm-lined beach. In the cockpit, the American pilot, a young, pleasant-looking, large-bodied man, peers out of the window toward the beach, barely visible in the light of the gibbous moon. After a few moments, he looks at his fuel gauges, both needles hard into the red zone. He shrugs, looks over to a Filipino man dressed in mechanics coveralls occupying the co-pilot’s seat, and his similarly dressed companion strapped into the jump seat behind them, hands gripping the seat edge, and says: “It’s either this or we swim, though I doubt Walters left us any life jackets. This terrifies the Filipinos more, so Bob says:”Sorry for getting you into this mess“, turns the craft, lies it up for a landing, and, just as one of the engines sputters and dies, plops onto the sand, rolling along the hard-packed sand until the nose is just meters from a rock formation at the end of the beach.

Bob and the two mechanics emerge from the aircraft, each holding a flashlight and checking for damage. All is well, and the mechanics, now with relieved smiles, congratulate Bob on his skill. Bob accepts the praise with a slight nod, and notices people carrying torches approaching. The villagers, though curious, stop about 20 meters away and call out in a language unknown to Bob. He looks to the mechanics, who shrug. So Bob calls out the only words he knew that might be understood: “Captain Petit Muharto”. The villages repeat the name among themselves, then one man turns and runs back the way they came. Another approaches Bob and the mechanics, smiles, puts his bunched fingers to his mouth to mime eating, and beckons the outlandish night visitors to follow him.

At Maguwo Air Base in Jogjakarta, a slight Indonesian man in a faded officers uniform picks up the telephone on his desk. His name tag reads: “Captain Petit Muharto Kartodirdjo”. The voice on the telephone informs Muharto that an American and two Filipinos had landed on a beach in a C-47 the previous evening and had asked for him by name.

“On a beach you say?”, Petit said, “and in the dead of night, and with no damage?”

“Yes sir, I can hardly believe it myself,” the voice says.

“Was his name Bob Freeberg?”, Muharto asks.

“How did you know, sir?”

“How could it be anyone else?” Muharto replies.

In the visitors room of a middle-class home in Jakarta, decorated in a tasteful, Dutch-influenced style, Petit Muharto, now in his 70s, says to a studious-looking Asian girl in her late teens sitting across from him: “Of all the foreign pilots I met organizing the blockade runs in 1947, only Bob Freeberg had the audacity, and the skill, to land a large craft like a C-47 on a narrow stretch of beach.”