Raid on Karangendah

On 8 June 1947 Bob Freeberg lands his unmarked Dakota cargo plane on remote Cilotok beach in southwest Java, the huge aircraft shuddering to a stop a few meters from a cliff at one end. Villagers appear, marveling at this colossus from the sky. They are friendly and offer Bob and his two Filipino crew members food and a place to sleep. But the following morning, Indonesian soldiers appear. One points to the lack of registration on the Dakotas tail and shouts “*Mata-Mata*!”, “Spy!” They point their rifles directly at Bob. He replies with the only words they might understand, a name: “Captain Petit Muharto”

On 25 September 1988, Cameron Bishop, an American journalism student interning at The Jakarta Post as a copy editor, sits with retired Air Force Major Petit Muharto at his home in Jakarta. Muharto had asked his old friend Sabam Siagian, the English-language newspaper’s managing editor, to publish a story commemorating Bob Freeberg on the 40th anniversary of his mysterious disappearance on 1 October 1948. Muharto begins his narrative by telling Cameron of a message he received one morning at his desk in Maguwo air base in Jogjakarta.

On 8 June 1947 Muharto is surprised to be given a message from an army lieutenant stationed in Tasikmalaya informing him that a foreign pilot had landed an unmarked cargo aircraft on a nearby beach and, astoundingly, had asked for Muharto by name. Muharto takes this information to his commander, Suryadarma, who tells him to fly to Tasik and find out which of Muharto’s “foreign flyboy friends” it is.

On 31 March 1947, Muharto leads a blockade run with Bob Freeberg, then a contract pilot for a Manila-based charter airline, as captain. Amid poor visibility over Java, Bob demonstrates his piloting skill by diving through a break in the clouds, leveling off under the cloud cover a few hundred meters above the ground. Muharto spots a railway line, and tells Bob that it leads along the valley to terminate in Jogja. Bob follows the line, barely visible through the rain, and jokingly asks Muharto if there are any tunnels between here the Jogja. The look on Muharto’s face suggests that he is not entirely sure.

Arriving at Cilotok on the afternoon of 9 June 1947, Muharto and Pang marvel that Freeberg had been able to land on this short stretch of beach, bookended by high bluffs. Muharto recognizes Freeberg and they greet as friends. Fearing that a patrolling Dutch fighter could appear at any time, Muharto, in a stirring speech, implores the assembled villagers to tear apart their houses to fashion an improvised runway from the bamboo mats used as walls. They do so, and with Muharto and Pang on board, the Dakota takes off and flies to Maguwo.

In Maguwo on the evening of 10 June 1947, Suryadarma commissions Bob to fly a cargo of high-value quinine to Manila and return with essential medicines and spare parts. Muharto expresses concern about the reception that might await unmarked aircraft carrying high-value goods into Manila. He suggests that they paint a fictitious registration number onto the tail. Muharto suggests RI-002. Bob says it should be RI-001, as his is the first aircraft. Suryadarma, imperiously, states that “RI-001” is reserved for a future presidential aircraft. Bob grumbles as Suryadarma issues the order to paint the number on the Dakota’s tail.

On 21 September 1947, RI-002 returns to Java. For security reasons RI-002 had to fly non-stop, which leaves them dangerously low on fuel as they reach Java. In the gathering darkness, Muharto has difficulty identifying landmarks. Tension mounts in the cabin as the fuel gauges slide toward empty. Bob admonishes Muharto saying: “This is your country, you should now where we are!” Muharto draws on the vivid schoolboy memory of his classmates giggling as they describe a range of low, rounded hills near Jogja as female breasts. He soon spots the distinctive geographic feature and, now oriented, guides Bob to a safe landing in Jogja.

In early October 1947, Muharto takes Bob for an afternoon walk to show him the town. Bob is impressed at the resilience of the people as they struggle with the privation caused by the Dutch blockade. They visit the palace of the former Dutch governor, now repurposed as the seat of the Indonesian Republic. As Bob admires the architecture, he is astounded to suddenly be ushered into the office of President Soekarno. As is his custom in private conversation, Soekarno treats Bob as an equal and puts him at ease, imploring the American to help his people in their struggle for freedom.

In mid November 1947, Muharto spots an small airplane near the horizon as they fly near Dutch territory. This is most likely a Dutch fighter on patrol, so Bob steers RI-002 into a tropical storm. Boedi grins when he sees Muharto’s terrified face as the Dakota is violently buffeted, with sickening plunges in altitude. Bob tells Muharto to not worry; when a Navy test pilot he would fly through typhoons.

Shortly before midnight on 30 November 1947, Bob flies a team of Republican officials and technocrats from Maguwo to a United Nation’s conference in the Philippines to make the case for Indonesian independence. These highly educated, cosmopolitan men treat Bob with the same great respect as do the common people of Jogja.

In mid May 1948, Suryadarma gives Muharto the good news that he is being promoted to major and reassigned. The bad news, at least according to Muharto, is that his new position is administrative and he will be piloting a desk.

Muharto tells Cameron that on the afternoon of 1 October 1948 he heard reports that RI-002 had not arrived at Bukittinggi. In the following days, the Dutch denied any knowledge of the disappearance, and the Republic was unable to mount more than a cursory search. Muharto shows Cameron a clipping dated 1983 about rattan gatherers finding wreckage on a remote mountain in South Sumatra. Muharto said that he used his AURI credentials to research the archives for the investigation report. He found, to his astonishment, that the wreckage had actually been discovered in April 1977.

On 17 April 1977, two wiry men dressed in shabby clothes lead a squad of airmen and their officer, Lt. Sulaiman, through a forested hillside to the wreckage of RI-002. The airmen set up camp and search the area. They find fragments of a wing with the faded letters: RI-00, other airplane parts, including a dynamo with a bullet wedged between the windings and armature. There are a few fragments of human remains, which the soldiers reverently dig from the earth and carefully wrap in cloth. They also find two empty wooden crates labeled: “Gold”, but a thorough search of the area does not find any trace of the treasure itself.

On 29 July 1977, five coffins draped in Indonesian flags lie on a platform in an otherwise empty hanger. A sixth coffin, larger than the rest and without a flag, rests on a separate platform. A flatbed truck pulls into the hanger and a squad of airmen, in silence, pick up each of the flag-draped coffins and place them on the truck. But they leave the sixth coffin where it lies as the truck pulls away.

Muharto tells Cameron that the sixth coffin, presumably containing Bob’s remains, could not be buried with the others because he was a foreigner. Muharto’s expression as he finishes his reminiscences convinces Cameron that he had regarded Freeberg as a close friend, and is seeking closure about his mysterious disappearance. As Cameron rises to leave, Muharto wonders that if he had turned down promotion and had been with Bob on the final flight, maybe it would not have ended in tragedy.

On 26 September 1988, Cameron writes up the interview, and gives it to managing editor Sabam Siagian, who had given him the assignment. Sabam glances at the copy, grunts, then passes the pages to Syd Jardine, the senior copy editor. Syd reads it, then remarks that Freeberg comes off as a “super-pilot” and not believable. He suggests Cameron find other accounts of Bob by researching in the reference section of the newly opened National Library.

On 27 September 1988, Cameron uses his Jakarta Post credentials to gain access to the reference section of the National Library. Julia Suryakusuma, an attractive, bookish woman in her early 20s, is the only staffer speaking fluent English, and so is assigned to assist him, as visitors are now allowing into the stacks. Cameron explains his mission, and Julia disappears into the stacks, returning shortly with a few books written by foreigners about the period. Skimming through the material, Cameron’s attention is drawn to a passage in a book by British diplomat John Coast relating events at a gathering of foreign aviators in the mountain town of Bukittinggi, a Republican base of operations.

On the evening of 8 March 1948 in the ballroom of the former Dutch governor’s palace in Bukittinggi, Richard Cobley drunkenly accuses Bob of taking the best blockade-running contracts through his close relationship with the Indonesian government. Later, while Bob stumbles along an unlit path to his lodgings, Cobley confronts him, warning that an “accident” might happen to his ramshackle Dakota unless he shares the wealth.

On 2 October 1988, the day after the article is published, Muharto visits The Jakarta Post to personally thank Sabam and Cameron. He says he he has been bombarded with calls from old Air Force comrades, asking about what happened to the gold. Muharto goes on to say that he had tried to solve the mystery himself, but had gotten nowhere.

In 1980 Muharto writes to his contacts in the Air Force and to the officers who participated in the crash-site investigation, but receives vague, non-committal replies — or only silence. He then tries his luck in Air Force archives and government libraries, but finds only disorder or even active obstruction as civil-service librarians question his qualifications and motives. The only solid result of his efforts is the report on the investigation of the crash site. One intriguing document is a photograph of a radio-set dynamo with a bullet lodged in the windings.

Syd Jardine says that since unloading a quarter ton of gold would require considerable resources, discovering who might have had the motivation and ability to transport and sell the gold could solve the mystery of RI-002. Muharto agrees, and Cameron eagerly offers to help. He tells Muharto that he knows just the person who could help them do the research.

On 5 October 1988 Cameron returns to the library to enlist Julia’s assistance. Julia is eager to help, and disappears into the stacks, emerging with bound volumes of Dutch-language newspapers. She reads aloud, in English, some news articles printed in the days after the disappearance.

On 5 October 1948 a reporter from the Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad newspaper accosts General Spoor in the hallway and badgers him for information of the fate of RI-002. Spoor claims ignorance, and grows visibly annoyed when the reporter press him, breaking off the interview and slamming the door to his office.

Julia notes that the snide tone of the language in the article suggests the reporter was convinced that Spoor was hiding something. She says they might get more information from Victor de Jong, a Dutch-born, naturalized Indonesian photographer who consults for the museum. Victor, Julia explains, had been a working in KNIL headquarters as an assistant photographic technician/analyst and reporting directly to Spoor.

In mid October 1988 Julia and Cameron enter the IPPHOS office, located on the ground floor of a building in the colonial-era section of Jakarta. The building is one municipal inspection away from being condemned. An ancient air conditioner wheezes over a window, having no discernible effect on the heat and humidity. The office has a single occupant: Victor, a slight, elderly man of sallow complexion, is the only person in the office who is openly delighted at receiving company. Julia introduces Cameron and explains the purpose of their visit. The negatives and prints of the collection are stored in tattered folders placed seemingly at random, but Victor strides confidently to a shelf, pulls out a folder from the middle of a pile, and brings it back to the desk. He leafs through the folder and pulls out a strip of negatives showing a large American standing in front of an airplane. It is Bob Freeberg and RI-002. Victor repeats the process and shows Cameron images of Spoor in his office. Victor explains that his desk was located in the hallway outside Spoor’s office, and on many occasion overheared Spoor raging about the foreign pilots running the Dutch blockade with impunity.

Victor searches for more shots of Batavia to prod his memory about Spoor’s efforts to stop the blockade runs. He stops when he comes across a photo of a strikingly beautiful Indonesian woman who, though dressed in baggy, paint-splattered overalls radiates elegance and poise. The caption reads “Emeria Soenassa in her studio 1948”. Julia asks Victor who she is. Victor replies “No one important”, snatches the photo from the table and files it away.

In early October 1988 Cameron invites Julia to join him for coffee before starting his shift at the Jakarta Post. Over coffee, Julia tells Cameron of her dream of securing a scholarship to pursue post-graduate studies in America. Cameron attempts, in turn, to tell of his dreams of becoming an international investigative journalist, to be free to write follow his own leads and write bestselling books. But Julia stops him, saying, with a mischievous smile, that if she wants to know anything about him she will simply ask her father, who is a senior officer in military intelligence. Cameron puts down his coffee, looks around involuntarily, then tells Julia it is time for him to go.

In mid October 1988 Julia’s curiosity about Emeria grows. She researches Emeria in Dutch-language art publications. learing that Emeria was the first female Indonesian painter of modern art. She was from an aristocratic family and extremely well-connected, with contacts at the highest levels in both Dutch and Indonesian society.

Julia returns to IPPHOS in mid October 1988 and presses Victor to tell her more about Emeria. Victor refuses.

In October 1947, Victor singles out Emeria as the highlight of the exhibition in one of his reviews. A few days later, Emeria contacts Victor Jan Boon to invite Victor to her studio.

In mid October 1947 Cameron accompanies Muharto to a village on the upper slopes of the Merapi volcano to meet Muharto’s spiritual advisor, Mbah Maridjan. The three hike the steep incline to a shrine; effortlessly in the case of the sexagenarian duo of Muharto and Maridjan; with some difficulty by their companion, some four decades their junior. Cameron watches respectfully as the two intone Islamic prayers, then lay Hindu-style floral offerings at the shrine to the gods of the mountain.

In mid October 1988 Muharto takes Cameron to the Air Force museum, a re-purposed hanger filled with decommissioned aircraft and other exhibits. Muharto points to a model of the Zogling training glider, and tells Cameron of training village boys who had never seen an airplane to become skilled pilots in mere weeks. Grinning, he tells of the time he fly one himself.

In September 1946, Muharto pulls rank and commandeers the Zogling training glider pulled by a Harley Davidson engine. When he lands, Suryadarma is waiting, and angrily orders him back to his desk.

In the museum, Muharto seeks out the curator, who invites them into his office. Muharto asks the curator to retrieve scraps from the RI-002 wreckage stored at the museum. One of the items is the dynamo with the bullet inexplicably lodged in the windings. Muharto picks it up, and from his point of view, the room around him fades into mist.

Muharto is astounded to realize he is somehow in the radio nook of RI-002 on the day of the crash. The airplane shutters as the engines scream in protest. Muharto sees two shadowy figures in the pilot seats, and a forested mountainside fills the window.

The museum office comes back into focus, and Muharto sees the concerned faces of Cameron and the curator. Muharto places the dynamo back into the storage box and says, in a wavering voice, that they will miss their train back to Jakarta if they don’t hurry.

On the evening of 10 October 1988, Cameron is having a drink at the Earthquake Bar, chatting with Sanyoto, when Colonel Eddy, out of uniform, takes the empty seat beside him. Sanyoto introduces “Pak Eddy” to Cameron and leaves them to chat. Eddy is affable, and asks Cameron general questions about how he likes Indonesia and other pleasantries. Then the conversation shifts to pointed inquiries about Cameron’s education and life goals. After Eddy leaves, Cameron remarks to Sanyoto that he feels like he has just been interrogated.

On the morning of 12 October 1988, Eddy has a heart-to-heart talk with Julia, letting her know that he opposes Julia marrying a foreigner. Eddy has checked into Cameron’s background, and found he is penniless and with a spotty academic record, though he excelled in journalism and seems to be a good writer. Julia retorts that her relationship with Cameron is purely professional. If the story they are researching results in a book, her expert facilitation will look good on a future application for graduate school.

In early October 1988, Muharto takes Cameron to visit Pang Soeparto. Pang is effusive in praising Muharto for winning the court case for the quinine, and how Muharto kept up spirits during the weeks of penury trying to sell the quinine and return home.

On 11 June 1947 Muharto awakes to discover that he and his crew are celebrities, with several newspapers giving front-page treatment to RI-002 and the “Javanese Crew”.

On 12 June 1947 Dutch representatives in Manila sue Muharto and Pang in civil court for possession of the quinine. Fortunately, Muharto’s celebrity status also attracts the attention of Salipada Penatun, a sitting Senator as well as a practicing lawyer. His family has close cultural ties to Indonesia, and so offers his services pro bono.

On 13 June 1947 Bob and Muharto are challenging the Dutch claim over the quinine cargo. Their lawyer, Salipada Penatun lays out the legal justification for ownership of the quinine, then lets Muharto give an impassioned plea, claiming that the money from selling the quinine will buy medicines and other essentials unavailable in the besieged capital. The Dutch counter by calling a plantation expert to testify that the Republic does not have the capability to process quinine, so the drug must have been produced in a Dutch-owed factory before the war. Muharto jumps to his feet, ready to protest this insult to his people’s technological skill, but Penatun motions for him to sit down, then calmly tells the judge: “A foreigner is not qualified to discuss the internal matters of the sovereign Republic of Indonesia.” The judge considers this with some sympathy, declines to allow the expert witness, and adjourns the session.

On 29 July 1947, the judge rules in favor of Muharto and Pang and realizes to them the quinine. The Dutch protest, but the ruling is final.

On 29 July 1947, Bob invites Muharto, Pang, and Boedi to his apartment to celebrate that morning’s verdict awarding the quinine to them. Bob’s housemate has a military-grade short-wave radio, which Boedi immediately switches on and scans the military and civilian frequencies. The party mood vanishes when a news broadcast announces that an Indian blockade runner has been shot down on approach to Maguwo. All look toward Bob, and he nods in acknowledgement that RI-002 might be the last remaining hope to connect the Republic with the rest of the world.

By mid August 1947, Muharto, Boedi and Pang are penniless as they wait for a buyer for the quinine. Bob buys his “Javanese boys” a single meal each day at the cheapest eatery in Manila: The Madras Curry Restaurant. Though Muharto protests whenever Bob picks up the bill for their bowls of curry, Bob insists that as captain of RI-002 he is responsible for their well-being until he returns them safely to Java.

One day in August 1947, Muharto attempts to pay for their meals at Madras Curry, explaining that it is an honorarium for a talk about the Indonesia struggle for freedom to a group of women lawyers. To his surprise, Bob chastises him for “taking money for nothing”.

In mid August 1947, Salipada arranges for Muharto and Pang to meet Major Primitivo of the intelligence service. In the meeting, Primitivo says that his government, to show solidarity with the embattled Republic, wants to send a seasoned guerrilla fighter to train the youth militias, but only under conditions of absolute secrecy. Primitivo then summons and introduces Captain Ignacio Espina.

At a party to celebrate the sale of the quinine in mid September 1947, Ining shows himself to be a party animal, buying rounds for his companions and flirting with the foreign women. Bob and Boedi hustle him out of bar after he hits on American colonels teenage daughter.

At the mention of Espina, Muharto’s face clouds, and tells Pang they must be going now. Cameron asks Muharto why they are in such a hurry, but he does not respond.

In mid October 1988, Muharto takes Cameron to a long-overdue reunion with Boediardjo, the radio operator of RI-002. The two old comrades revel in recounting their experiences on RI-002, including the time Bob dove into a tropical storm to evade a Dutch patrol.

As they approach Manila on 10 June 1947, Bob invites Muharto to sit in co-pilot seat and assist him with the flap controls. Muharto is nervous, and pushes the flaps to full, causing the aircraft to make a sickening lurch. Bob calmly reaches over, sets the flaps correctly, and gives Muharto a friendly wink to show he is not angry at the mistake.

At the airport on 10 June 1947, Bob is told to identify his co-pilot, a requirement for twin-engine aircraft on long-haul flights. Muharto gambles the Filipino officers cannot read Indonesia, and shows them his Air Force identification and falsely claims the rank of “Pilot”.

On 17 October 1947, Bob and Boedi fly ten paratroopers to be dropped near an insurgent stronghold in the forests of Kalimantan. None have jumped before, or even been in a aircraft, so tension is high. There is an uproar as the parachute of one trooper opens and dumps onto the cabin floor. The trooper swears it was an accident, but all others accuse him of cowardice. The troopers look at each other, wondering if any one will be next. Boedi enters the cabin. Though he is only an airman, the charismatic Boedi takes command of the situation, assuring the troopers that Bob has much wartime experience flying paratroopers and will drop them safely. He goes to the cockpit and talks with Bob for a moment. The Bob turns the aircraft over to his co pilot, leaves his seat and stands in the doorway, his body filling the frame. With Boedi translating, Bob assures the troops that he has done this many times during the war, and will drop them exactly on the requested target. Emboldened by Bobs air of quiet competence, each trooper moves forward and shakes Bobs hand. Bob returns to his seat, the dropmaster issues the command to jump, and the cabin empties, save for the dropmaster and a lone recruit wondering what fate is in store for him back at Maguwo. Boedi watches as the parachutes drift down and land are enveloped by the endless forest. Boedi asks Bob how many paradrops he made. Bob grins and answers: “None. I was a Navy pilot. All my missions were over water.”

On 20 October 1947 Bob flies two Indonesian aviators, Halim and Iswandi, to Bangkok where they will purchase a twin-prop airplane that will become RI-003. Dutch authorities pressure the Thai government to detain Freeberg as a blockade runner. The Thais briefly detain Freeberg in a comfortable hotel room, but the Indonesian crew must find their own accommodation. They can only afford rooms in a bar district. Boedi is delighted, but Halim and Iswandi are appalled. Both are engaged to be married, and worry that the families of their fiancées will learn that they have stayed in such a disreputable environment.

On 10 October 1947 Bob flies three United Nations representatives to Sumatra, where they will assess popular support for the Republic.

One evening in late October 1947, Bob invites Muharto to join him for dinner at the Hotel Merdeka. Bob is embarrassed when served the last can of corned beef left by the GOC delegates.

After putting the paper to bed one evening in mid October, Syd invites Cameron to join him for a few drinks at his favorite bar, the Earthquake. He introduces Cameron to the owner, Sanyoto had been a drill sergeant in the Air Force, then worked as a fixer for foreign oil companies until he retired and opened the bar. Sanyoto maintains wide contacts in the highest levels of government and the military, so the Earthquake is popular with generals and cabinet ministers. Sanyoto tells Cameron that, as a friend of Syd, he is always welcome here, as long as he minds his manners and doesn’t “needle” any of his regular guests.

That evening, the music is supplied by a band playing keroncong, a guitar-driven genre that features sentimental Dutch-language lyrics. Regarded as “music for old folks” the audience of senior and retired military officers laps it up. Afterward, Sanyoto introduces Syd and Cameron to Samuel Quiko, the band leader. Sanyoto mentions that Samuel had been active in the revolution, and might have interesting stories to tell.

When researching with Julia at the library in late October 1988, Cameron mentions his meeting with Samuel Quiko. Julia remarks on distinctive name, indicating a Portuguese heritage, and remembers seeing it in a review of a musical performance in 1947. She disappears into the stacks, reappearing with an armful of magazines containing articles about keroncong. Julia sees that in several of the photos Samuel is with Emeria. Julia suggests that they interview Samuel Quiko. Cameron demurs, saying that a guy who plays “music for seniors” would be of little value in investigating the fate of RI-002.

In mid October 1988, Julia goes alone to Kampung Tugu, a village on the outskirts of Jakarta that is the home of keroncong, to interview Samuel Quiko. Samuel tells of the peril his people faced after the war, being regarded as “Brown Dutchmen”

1n October 1945, youth gangs armed with deadly bamboo spears roam the streets, threatening Europeans and any Indonesians deemed to be allied with the Dutch. Samuel leads his neighbors in setting up nightly patrols of Kampung Tugu and barricading entrances to the village.

Samuel tells Julia that during the Bersiap period he sought the protection of the local preman. To prove his loyalty to the Republic, he offers to use his unique position of being able to access both colonial and Republican worlds to act as a courier or even a spy.

In September 1947, Samuel and his band play at an art exhibition at the Kuntskring. In between sets, Samuel chats with a Dutch attendee, who surreptitiously hands him a small package.

After the show, they are stopped by a Dutch patrol. Samuel tells them they are musicians returning from a society gathering, and as proof the take out their guitars and break into a Dutch-language Stamboel song. The soldiers grin and let him pass.

They continue walking to the house in a “native” neighborhood where they will spend the night. There, Samuel gives the package to a Republican official.

In early November 1988 Muharto takes Cameron to meet his friend Alex Kawilarang, Also present is a Paul Verspoor, who is a retired Dutch airforce officer vacationing in Indonesia. Verspoor, who had been a KNIL squadron leader, tells Cameron about his “very boring mission” waiting to intercept RI-002 near Bukittinggi on 1 October 1948. Afterward, as he escorts Muharto and Cameron to the door, Alex winks at Cameron and tells him to keep looking, as his old friend Paul knows more than he lets on.

In mid November 1988, Muharto and Cameron visit the widow and son of Santoso. The son, Hadi, admits that the night before the ceremony he talked a guard into letting him view his father’s remains, and took a necklace belonging to his father when the guard’s back with turned. He gave the neckace his mother, who was holding it at the ceremony the following morning when she feel into trance and had a horrifying vision of being in the cockpit as it crashed. Muharto asks to hold the necklace. He intones prayers and matras and falls into a trance. He opens his eyes to find he is in the RI-002 cockpit, this time sitting in the co-pilot seat, where he had spent hundreds of hours. He turns to the left, expecting to see Bob, but instead sees Bambang flying the Dakota.

In December 1946 Bob partners with Singapore-based businessman Hugh Savage to start Southeastern Airlines.

In March 1947, Bob Freeberg joins with Bob Walters to purchase a war-surplus Dakota. They agree to equal ownership of the craft, and will equally contribute to making it airworthy.

On 1 April 1947 Bob returns to Manila to find the jointly owned Dakota is missing. Suspecting an April Fools joke, Bob plays along, but becomes concerned when the aircraft does not reappear. Bob does not confront Walters, Instead, he discovers the location, and moves it himself to another strip on the outskirts of Manila.

In August 1947 the gregarious and charismatic Boedi had been wholly accepted by the Aviation Brotherhood, the freewheeling foreign pilots seeking their fortunes or reliving wartime adventures in often-dangerous charter flights into remote areas of the region. At the AB bar, Boedi learns more about Bob, particularly the recognition by his peers that he is the most skillful and courageous aviator in Southeast Asia. Boedi also learns that Freeberg is in considerable financial difficulty, and is in a legal battle with another aviator, Bob Walters, his partner in purchasing the aircraft now known as RI-002. Walters is scathing in his condemnation, calling Bob a thief and a con man.

In 10 November 1988, Eddy tells Julia that he is determined to fulfill the dream of his only child to study overseas. Julia reminds him that his nickname is “Honest Eddy” and that his only income is his military wage. Eddy replies that he is making arrangements. Julia is doubtful, but agrees to go along with whatever he plans, as long as it is not an arranged marriage to some rich brat.

On the evening of 11 November 1988, Julia is sitting in a restaurant with Eric, a young Indonesian man of good family. Eric mentions his surprise Julia’s mother phoned his mother to suggest he take her to dinner. Eric dominates the conversation, insisting, with the authoritative confidence typical of the offspring of new wealth, how he is an essential component in the business deal that their respective fathers are cooking up. Julia wants more details about this “business deal”, but decides it would be better to remain silent.

In late October 1988, while Cameron drinks alone in the Earthquake, Sanyoto introduces him to George Rueneker, a retired Air Force officer who owns an aviation-services company. George is of mixed European-Indonesian heritage and, like many of his fellow “Indos” decided to support the Indonesian struggle for freedom.

In early October 1947 Muharto moves Ining into a house on Jalan Jetis on the slopes of Mount Merapi, adjacent to the forested areas where Ining will train students to become guerrilla fighters. They toast the occasion with whiskey brought from Manila.

In late October 1947, Muharto sees that Ining is isolated living among the youth militia in the forest. He asks George to keep Ining company in his absence. George witnesses Ining berate the young recruits and sees the displeasure on their faces. Whenever he visits, Ining asks George to bring whiskey the next time.

On 30 November 1947, the evening that RI-002 will fly the Indonesian diplomats to Manila, Ining writes a letter Major Primitivo asking to be relieved of his assignment and returned home. He rushes to Maguwo, but is seconds too late to give it to Muharto to take to Manila. George, on duty as flight controller, is on the tarmac. He sees that Ining is upset, so he asks Muharto’s brother, Mas Ded, to take Ining back to Jalan Jetis and stay with him until his calms down.

On 27 December 1947, RI-003 crashes on a beach in Malaya. Dutch embassy representatives join the British investigation team at the crash site, insisting that the aircraft had been attempting to smuggle guns into Sumatra.

During a routine radio contact with Jogja on 17 December 1947, Boedi is told that Ining and Mas Ded were found dead of gunshot wounds at Ining’s house.

On 18 December 1947, Muharto reports Ining’s death to Primitivo. Muharto is astounded when the major accuses Muharto and his late brother of being clandestine communists, and detains Muharto for interrogation.

On 29 December 1947, RI-002 departs for Pekanbaru carrying 14 Republican officials and a coffin containing Ining’s remains. Bad weather over Pekanbaru forces RI-002 to divert to Singapore. Dutch representatives on the island pressure the British into grounding the Dakota because of “airworthiness” issues.

On 15 January 1948, British officials open Ining’s coffin, searching for contraband. Finding none, and with RI-002 brought up to minimal airworthiness standards, they granted Bob permission to depart, to the great annoyance of the Dutch.

On 28 December 1947, Spoor is dumbfounded when he reads the report on the crash of RI-003. Spoor investigators discover that the plane, though carrying medicine and spare parts, was not carrying guns, Instead, it was overloaded with household items such as dinner plates and cutlery.

In mid January 1948, Spoor reads an article in a Manila newspaper speculating that Ining’s death resulted from an arms deal gone disastrously wrong. He decides to make stopping the blockade runners a priority.

In mid February 1948 Muharto and Boedi shop for clothes for their fellow officers.

In February 1948, Bob finally receives his share from the sale of the quinine. He sends a sizable amount to an automobile dealership in Parsons to purchase an Oldsmobile for his parents.

In February 1948, Salipada Penatun offers to have Bob Walters deported. On the advice of Tom Lee, Bob declines the offer.

In mid August 1947, Pang, Boedi and Muharto enjoy a brief respite from their meager diet when Tom Lee invites them for drinks or dinner. During these pleasant encounters, Tom expresses a lively interest in the situation and politics of the Republic. Muharto is pleased that a foreigner should care about the struggle of his people, and provides voluminous answers to Tom’s questions.

In early November 1988 Cameron and Julia have dinner with Muharto and Ani. Afterward, Cameron and Muharto fall deep into discussion about the revelations of their investigations. By this point, both Ani and Julia think they are plummeting down a conspiracy rabbit hole, but keep their views to themselves. Instead Ani tells Julia stories when her husband was a dashing young officer, and the hardships of life in besieged Jogja.

In early April 1948, Ani’s father questions Muharto about his career path. He notes that as nominal co-pilot of RI-002 he is no more than an airborne truck driver taking unnecessary risks. If he wants to marry his daughter, he will need to put himself on a fast promotion track by assuming managerial duties.

In mid July 1948 Ani helps to acquire rice for a communal kitchen to feed the thousands of refugees pouring into Jogjakarta. She is overwhelmed, never having set foot in a kitchen in her life, but soon sees how the process could be more efficient and orders to cooks to form an assembly line.

In mid May 1948 Muharto tells Ani that he as been offered a promotion, but wishes to decline so he can continue flying with Freeberg. Hearing this, Ani’s father says that he can only marry his daughter if he stops flying around and takes a proper a desk job.

In March 1948, Muhammad Hatta invites John Coast to to begin regular services to Jogja. Coast and investors in Bangkok form Pacific Overseas Air Charter, or POAS, and hire American Dave Fowler as head pilot.

In January 1948, a semi-piratical British aviator, Ralph Cobley arranges with the finance ministry to make blockade runs in his amphibious Catalina registered as RI-005.

In March 1948, Suryadarma orders Bob to transport Republican opium to Bukittinggi. Bob knows that if he is intercepted, the Dutch could jail him for decades as a drug smuggler. Nevertheless, he accepts the commission without complaint.

In early May 1948, Bob waits in the pre-dawn gloom for Bambang and the crew to show up for an opium run. They drive up after dawn, laughing and joking. Bob is furious, but keeps his voice measured, telling Bambang and the others that they are “Not Ready for Airplanes”, they jumping into their automobile and telling the driver to take him back to the hotel.

In mid April 1948, Spoor learns that RI-002 is flying the Republican stockpile of opium to Bukittinggi. He decides to brand Freeberg as a narcotic smuggler, which would allow his fighters to use deadly force if they encounter RI-002.

In April 1948, Hugh Savage tells Bob that he is concerned that the Bob Walter’s fiasco has warned off potential customers and investors of SE Airways.

In mid October 1988 Julia interviews Auke Sonnega. He describes how Emeria drew him into the Republican world.

In November 1947 Emeria takes Victor along (out of uniform) as she paints portraits of people.

In early December 1948, Spoor warns Victor about fraternizing with Emeria and the Republican artists. Spoor threatens to reassign Victor to a combat unit.

In mid October 1988, Julia is processing a shipment of English-language books about Indonesia for inclusion in the library collection. One book, *Our Hotel in Bali*, catches her eye, as the author is Louise Koke. A quick glance at the contents confirms that Louise is the wife of Robert Koke, and the book about the couple running Bali’s first “bohemian-chic” hotel in the 1930s. The portrait of Robert Koke emerging from the pages wholly contradicts the perception of a CIA officer seeking to destabilize a regime. Julia writes a letter to the publisher, requesting it be passed to the Kokes.

In mid November 1988, Julia informs Cameron about Robert Koke. Cameron dismisses her, saying that CIA agents are masters at dissemination. Julia is annoyed and offended, but remains silent. Instead, she sends a letter to Koke through the book’s publisher, asking for more info about his time in Batavia.

At a party in Manila in mid April 1948, Muharto is appalled when one of Bob’s housemates boasts of shooting down own squad leader. He decides to not tell Bob of his plan to smuggle gems into Manila to be traded for sidearms. He arranges for Filipino commandos to enter RI-002 and retrieve the gems from a concealed niche. The following morning, Bob notices that the cockpit had been disturbed, and confronts Muharto.

In mid March 1948, tensions rise in the RI-002 cockpit as Muharto and Bambang argue over who gets to sit in the right-hand seat. Muharto contends that as mission leader he should claim the coveted position. Bambang counters that Muharto is not a pilot, and is denying him the flying hours he needs to quality for piloting twin-engine craft.

In mid April 1948, Moeljono pilots the newly purchased twin-engine RI-005 Avro-anson from Bukittinggi to Jogjakarta. Bambang is beside himself with envy, and redoubles his efforts to claim the co-pilot seat of RI-002.

In late November 1988, Julia finds Muharto’s name mentioned in article about Permesta. “Colonel” Muharto had commanded the Revolutionary Air Force, a squadron of fighters and bombers provided by the CIA, and had participated in at least one bombing raid himself. One of the CIA pilots, Allen Pope, had been shot down and captured, embarrassing the US. The Revolutionary Air Force was disbanded soon afterward, and Muharto and his family fled to exile in Malaya.

On 22 November 1988, Julia confronts Cameron with the evidence that Muharto was the point man for the CIA air force. Cameron insists that Julia has misinterpreted the article.

In early May 1948 Bambang finally gets his permanent assignment as RI-002 co-pilot when Muharto is promoted and reassigned to headquarters. He starts his first mission by suggesting a route, as Muharto would do as mission leader. But Bob rebukes him, saying his only job is to watch and learn.

One morning in May 1948, the landing gear collapses just as RI-002 is preparing to take off from the strip at Bukittinggi. Bob checks the wing for damage, and decides that the new crack in not serious. Later that morning he takes off. Dave Fowler looks on, shaking his head.

On the Soekarno Tour in mid June 1948 Bambang ingratiates himself with Soekarno in the hope of being selected to fly RI-001. Boedi finds his efforts, and Soekarno’s condescending replies, amusing.

During the Soekarno tour In mid June 1948, Bob refuses Soekarno’s order to land on unsafe airfield. Soekarno is annoyed, but then commends Bob for standing up to him.

In late June 1948 during a speech on an airstrip, Soekarno stands on the RI-002 wing and speaks to a small, enthralled crowd of local residents. Toward the end of the speech, Soekarno points to Bob in the cockpit, proclaiming: “This is Bob Freeberg, a brave, good man and a friend of all Indonesians”

On 1 July 1948 Suryadarma orders Bob to Sumatra on another mission. Bob refuses, and infuriates Suryadarma by returning to Manila that day.

In mid December 1988, Cameron arranges to meet Alex and Paul at the Earthquake the night before Paul will return to the Netherlands. After several drinks, and with Alex urging him on, Paul reveals that Westerling had contacted him in early 1949 to ask if his squadron would support a coup against the colonial government. Verspoor knew that many of his squadron would support Westerling, and so gave a vague, noncommittal answer. Verspoor realizes his indiscretion, and begs Cameron to not repeat this information, as most of his former comrades are still alive.

In early December 1988 Julia receives a letter from Florida. It is not from Robert Koke, but a nephew, who explains that his uncle is reticent about his days with the CIA. Nevertheless, the nephew is enthralled by the stories, so he used Julia’s letter as an excuse to ply his uncle with a few whiskeys. The nephew is a born storyteller himself, and Julia is immediately drawn into the vivid descriptions of events in post-war Batavia, at least those that are not still classified intelligence, even 40 years on.

In mid June 1948, Cobley repatriates communist cadres exiled during the colonial era. He secretly transports them to isolated Campurdarat lake in eastern Java where they continue to Madiun.

On 10 September 1948 Spoor orders a night patrol not to engage a blockade running POAS flight because he is informed that American and other civilians are passengers.

On 15 August 1948 Bob flies RI-002 from Manila to Jogja. Both the pilot and aircraft have are in top condition, and Bob looks forward to getting back to work.

In September 1948 Suryadarma takes away Fowler’s fuel allowance. Fowler resolves the issue by going over Suryadarma’s head and complaining directly to Muhammad Hatta, who had signed the charter agreement with POAS.

In late August 1948, Freeberg invites Boedi to share a bottle of whiskey he brought from Manila. Boedi shows up with Muharto, and charms Freeberg into speaking with his former “co-pilot” and reconciling their differences.

On 10 September 1948, while flying a group of international journalists to Jogja under cover of darkness, Fowler believes he spots fighter planes tailing him. His radio operator hears traffic on Dutch military frequencies. When when Fowler looks again, the fighters are gone.

In September 1948 Suryadarma takes away Bob’s fuel allowance for undisclosed reasons.

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

in mid November 1988, Julia reads a notice about an upcoming exhibition by an amateur watercolorist named Regina. Her bio mentions Emeria as one of her influences. At the exhibition, Julia learns that Regina had been Emeria’s pembantu, and so arranges an interview.

In late October 1988, Julia interviews Regina. Regina describes her experiences as a 16 year old village girl in Emeria’s salon.

Regina suggests the Julia talk to Emeria herself. Julia is astounded to learn that Emeria is not in Europe, but had returned to Indonesia and now lives in Jogjakarta.

On 24 October 1948 Ani and Muharto marry. The day is marked by equal measures of joy and sadness, as the absence of Bob Freeberg weighs heavy on Muharto’s heart.

On 27 December 1948, A Dutch patrol stops Muharto and Ani as they return home. The soldiers point to Muharto’s khaki shorts and accuse him of being in the military. Ani summons all the imperious passion of a high-born Javanese women to give the commanding officer a vicious tongue lashing, diverting attention while Muharto swallows his Air Force identification.

In early December 1988 Julia tracks down Emiria teaching art to children in a village on the outskirts of Jogja. Emeria reveals that she after independence she traveled to the Netherlands on a “colonial guilt” scholarship, married a Dutch academic, and returned to Indonesia after his death a few years previously. Emeria regrets using Victor, but says that in war you have to choose sides.

On 27 December 1948, Spoor sends Victor to Jogja with the invading troops to prove photograph what he expects to be a warm welcome as liberators. The reception is anything but that. Victor is part of the squadron that accosts Muharto and Ani in the market, and witnesses Ani berating the squad commander.

On 28 December 1948, Jogjakarta is declared declared secure, and Victor can walk around Jogja alone to document the condition of the town. A man he recognizes as a friend of Emeria approaches him in a quiet alley to say that if he wants to defect, Emeria is with Sudirman’s forces in the hinterland. Victor says he will bring his camera so the world can witness the strength and courage of the Indonesians. The man nods in agreement, then admonishes Victor to not forget his gun and as much ammunition as he can carry.

in early December 1988 Julia tells meets Victor to tell him about her encounter with Emeria. Victor now confesses to Julia that he did not resign from KNIL after independence, but deserted during the taking of Jogja so he would be with Emeria. Julia then explains that Emeria was just using him to get information about Spoor. Victor does not speak as he turns away to sort photographs.

Leaving the Earthquake on evening in early December 1988, Cameron is waylaid by Pemuda Pancasila thugs outside of the Earthquake. Sanyoto appears, and whacks the leader on the nose with his cane.

In early December 1988 Sanyoto arranges meeting with Yapto, the head of the Pemuda Pancasila. Yapto is affable, and expresses a sincere apologize for the unpleasantness with his boys, which must have been a case of mistaken identity. Yapto gives Cameron a signed business card to show to any PP members who might threaten him in the future.

On Julia confronts her father with the suspicion that he was behind the PP harassment of Cameron. Eddy confesses, insisting he was doing it for her. Anyway, he continues, this is all moot as he is not in a position to fund her studies in an overseas graduate school. Julia refuses, saying she would rather marry the wrong guy than see her father stoop to corruption.

On 28 September 1948 RI-002 drops leaflets over Madiun. Santoso is valuable in pointing out neighborhoods where residents may be receptive to message from government to stay loyal to the Republic.

During the propaganda leaflet run over Madiun on 27 September 1948, Bambang watches Bob demonstrate how to guide RI-002 through low-level maneuvers to evade enemy fighters.

On 29 September 1948 Hugh Savage tells Bob that Southeast Airlines has failed, their one aircraft has been repossessed, and he has lost his investment.

On 25 September Tom Lee accompanies the last RI-002 flight to Jogja to “study veterans claims”. Tom and Bob apply for a license to shoot a documentary film.

On 29 September 1948 Suryadarma orders Fowler to transport a quarter ton of gold to Bukittinggi. Fowler refuses the commission as being too risky. Suryadarma has no choice but the turn to Bob Freeberg.

On 30 September 1948 Suryadarma reluctantly assigns Bob the mission to transport gold to Bukittinggi.

On 16 December 1988 Anwar arranges for Cameron to sneak into Karangendah with his nephew, who is smuggling out tank diesel engine parts which are military grade and reliable. Good for smuggling boats.

In December 1988 Anwar reveals that KNIL officers had paid him to smuggle a substantial quantity of gold to Singapore. Anwar also introduces Cameron to several men who had been employed at Karangendah in menial civilian jobs. They attest that they had seen the crew in captivity. However, no one remembers seeing Freeberg. Anwar Congo reveals that gold was used to purchase guns smuggled from Malaya, which then taken overland to Lampung by Sumatra preman.

On 5 October 1948 Bambang decides to fly RI-002 back to Jogja, but crashes on Mount Punggur.

On 5 October 1948 Bambang takes control and flies back to Branti. When they reach the mountain range on the border with Republican controlled Lampung, the escorting fighters attack. Bambang dives into valleys, recreating what Bob did the previous week.