

THE ICAO CORNER

by Albert Pelsser

INDONESIA: FROM THE SEULAWAH TO GARUDA INDONESIAN AIRWAYS



Figure 1

This is the second story of the series of articles titled "The ICAO Corner"; it focuses on the Indonesian history of the first aircraft named "Seulawah" which is the forerunner of the commercial airline, Garuda Indonesian Airways. The DC-3 Seulawah was also the most important and effective instrument in the earliest stages of the struggle for the independence of Indonesia. The stamp serving as basis of this story was issued in 1994 by the latter country to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which has its headquarters in Montreal, Canada, since 1945.

The Dutch had ruled Indonesia since the 16th

century, when the powerful East India Company controlled almost all trade in the region. Generations of Dutch planter and mining families oversaw the transfer of a wealth of natural resources to the Netherlands, that is, tea, coffee, spices, textiles, petroleum and minerals. The Dutch East Indies were the richest colonial possession of Holland. By 1940, they became a vital objective for Japan, which needed its rubber and oil, and the islands were occupied by Japanese troops in December 1941. Japan's 3½-year occupation of Indonesia was to be a crucial factor in the coming revolution in Indonesia.

On 7 September 1944, with the war going badly for



Figure 2

the Japanese, the Prime Minister of Japan promised independence for Indonesia. Under pressure from radical and politicized youth groups, the two nationalist leaders Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese Emperor's surrender in the Pacific. The following day, Sukarno was declared President, and Hatta Vice President. Between the time of Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945 and the Netherlands' recognition of Indonesia's independence in 1949, the Indonesian War of Independence was an armed conflict and diplomatic struggle between the two countries. After WWII, Dutch forces were too weak to prevail over the inexperienced but determined Indonesians, but strong enough to resist being expelled.

As Indonesia had proclaimed independence, the fledgling state, at war with the Dutch, formed on 9 April 1946 its own Air Force (as a separate service, independent from the army), named Angkatan Udara Republik Indonesia, or AURI; 9 April was later proclaimed National Aviation Day in Indonesia.

Since then, there were plans to form a presidential air transport mode and build up a transport force, fast and practical, considering that Indonesia is an archipelago and a very spacious area. The first attempt was to modify some Japanese bombers heritage into the presidential transport aircraft and state officials; about 30 aircraft, all of Japanese design, were so put in flying condition. Unfortunately, these

planes were destroyed in July 1947 by a Dutch military aggression.

In December 1947, the Republican Government took the first steps to initiate the purchase of transport aircraft and the Bureau of the Air Force prepared plans for approximately 25 Dakota aircraft. However funds were lacking. First, an Australian Avro 652A Anson registered VH-BBY was chartered and had been allocated the registration RI-003 (RI for Republic Indonesia); unfortunately, the aircraft crashed, while returning to Indonesia after a flight to Siam (renamed Thailand in 1949), before this registration could be taken up; RI-003 registration was assigned later to a Stinson L-5 acquired from an Australian pilot named Cobbey. It is to be noted that ICAO never officially sanctioned the prefix RI- for the Republic of Indonesia (since it was not truly an independent state at that time). Indonesia joined ICAO as the 60th Member on 27 April 1950 and the prefix PK- was given for the registration of its aircraft.

Another Indonesian-registered aircraft was RI-002 (RI-001 number was reserved for the President's future plane), a Douglas DC-3/C-47 Dakota owned by an American pilot, Bobby Freeberg, who flew for the Republic on secret missions; his aircraft mysteriously crashed later on 29 September 1948.

In June 1948, Freeberg made a tour of Sumatra carrying President Sukarno who appealed to the populace

for money to buy another Dakota. Aceh is a special region of Indonesia, located at the northern end of Sumatra; with its substantial natural resources, it had a history of political independence and fierce resistance to control by outsiders, including the former Dutch colonists.

On 16 June 1948, at a dinner party held at the Atjeh Hotel, Banda Aceh, by the Association of Merchants of the Aceh region, President Sukarno managed to arouse the patriotism of the people of Aceh and said: "I will not eat tonight, if funds are not collected". The dinner scene became an important episode of Acehnese to raise funds for the purchase of aircraft. In his speech on 17 June 1948 at a rally in Blang Padang Banda Aceh field, Sukarno proclaimed excited: "I expect a very large participation of the people of Aceh to rescue the Republic of Indonesia. The area of Aceh is essential for the Republic and, through the struggle of the people of Aceh, the entire territory of the Republic can be retaken." By 20 June, the equivalent of 20 kilograms of gold was collected from donations by the people of Aceh.

As a result, the government of Indonesia bought in September 1948 a Douglas DC-3 Dakota from an American aviator J.H. Maupin in Hong Kong. The plane with registration number VR-HEC landed in Maguwo and was then registered RI-001 by the Civil Aviation Directorate of the Air Force, as the identity of the presidential plane. President Sukarno himself gave the name *SEULAWAH* to this aircraft, meaning *Mountain of Gold* in Aceh language.

The RI-001 Dakota Seulawah aircraft (see maximum card at Figure 1; postmarked on 9 April 1999, i.e. on Indonesia National Aviation Day) opened the flight path of the Java-Sumatra line. It was the first Indonesian airways national airplane and a symbol of the enormous contribution and heroic donation of the Aceh people to the struggle of the early formation of the Republic of Indonesia. It also became the forerunner to the establishment of the first commercial airline, Garuda Indonesian Airways, now named Garuda Indonesia after the mythical giant bird Garuda of

Hinduism and Buddhist mythologies.

As it had been decided to install long-range tanks on the RI-001 and because the airplane needed an overhaul, the aircraft flew in early December 1948 to India to have both operations performed over there. But due to a second Dutch military offensive during that month to suppress certain subversive forces inside the Republic and due to financial and administrative problems, RI-001 was not able to return home and was eventually granted authorization on 20 January 1949 to operate in Burma (now Myanmar). On 26 January 1949, the Seulawah flew from Calcutta, India to Rangoon, Burma; this charter business activity institutionalized the airline named Garuda Indonesian Airways with the main office being located at that time at Rangoon, Burma.

Apart from being the first transport aircraft belonging to Indonesia, Seulawah RI-001 also underwent secret missions to smuggle weapons, ammunition and communications equipment from Burma to Aceh, thus helping to break the blockade of colonial occupation army.

Several aircraft had been acquired at that time for use by either the newly forming airline or national Air Force in the country. They were: two DC-3s RI-001 (ex VR-HEC) and RI-002, a Stinson Sentinel L-5 RI-003, an Avro 652A Anson RI-004 (ex VH-AGX), two Catalinas RI-005 (ex VH-BDP) and RI-006 (ex PI-C274).

In 1984, the Air Force initiated the erection of a monument with the Dakota Seulawah RI-001 aircraft at the Blang Padang field in Banda Aceh.

The First Day Cover at Figure 2 (with Scott #1595) was autographed by Professor Dr. Ing. Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, Indonesia; the cachet shows the tail of a Fokker F-28. In 1994, the ICAO Council conferred the Edward Warner Award to Dr. Habibie for his eminent contribution to aircraft design and helping to shape his country's policies in the field of civil aviation and aerospace technology. Later, he became the third President of Indonesia from 21 May 1998 to 20 October 1999.

CHECKLIST

Indonesia	1595	1994 Dec 07	DC-3 Dakota Seulawah RI-001
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REFERENCES

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garuda_Indonesia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesian_National_Revolution

