

Keramat Tunggak

Sam Choo's story about the "Inspector's Wife" reminds me of a similar episode when I was Master of the Goldensari I and Goldensri II. It goes back to 1979-1980.

The ships were operated by Pacific Carriers Ltd (PCL) and plying between Jakarta and Western Australia. Albany was the main loading port with Bunbury occasionally. The disport was Jakarta and the crew loved it. The vessels always berthed alongside the Bogasari Flour Mill wharf in Tanjung Priok, North of Jakarta. We usually stay in Tanjung Priok for about a week and believe me, once the vessel berthed the crew after their duties or day work will make their way to the infamous Keramat Tunggak, a place of ill repute where an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 women of equally ill dispute await them.

Keramat Tunggak was about a stone throw from the Bogasari wharf gate and a short trip on the "becha" will get you there in no time. The crew would live there for the duration of the port stay and each had his own sweetheart and home.

Being a righteous man, I never frequented Keramat Tunggak. I always kept my distance and the nearest I ever got there was when I gave a lift to the Chief Officer and Second Engineer (I still remember their names, however I do not mention them here as I need to protect their privacy) but stopped about 500 metres from the entrance and told them they have to walk there them self.

You see, Bogasari always provided me with a driver and a car when the vessel was alongside. It was a Peugeot 504. Off course I cannot be seen inside Bogasari's car right at the entrance of Keramat Tunggak otherwise the whole of Bogasari would know the next day! So you know why I never set foot on that place apart from my righteousness.

Now the similarity with Uncle Sam's story is when the vessel was about to sail. I had to request the agent to go in to Keramat Tunggak and using a loudspeaker, make repeated announcements of the vessel's impending departure as he made his way around the kampong. By resorting to this, I know I will get all the crew back as I said earlier this was where their homes were and you can round them up easily. I never had any missing crew on departure.

The voyage to Albany was about 5 days. Just as the vessel was about to arrive, the Second Mate would provide a list of those who wanted to seek medical attention ashore. No prize for guessing what the common ailment was. Ninety percent had a penile discharge – with compliments for the girls of Keramat Tunggak.

On one voyage, the Australian Port Health Authority in Albany nearly refused to grant the vessel free pratique due to the high incidence of STD (sexually transmitted disease) on board. Luckily my good relationship with the Port Health Officer, Doctor MacCarthy, paid dividend as he let me off with a light warning - literally a slap on the wrist. Doctor MacCarthy used to attend to the vessel on each and every call in Albany and we soon became friends. Off course after he cleared the ship, I will invite him for a glass or two of whisky which he never refused especially in the evening. One day I heard after he left the ship at night, he rode his motorcycle into a lamp post. I think it must be the whisky! Luckily he was not hurt. I do not know if he is still alive today and I will be glad to meet up with him again.

I was again in Jakarta in year 2001 to 2003 where I was sent on attachment by PCL to Bogasari. One day I decide to take a look at Keramat Tunggak for old time sake. There was no more Keramat Tunggak. I was told the placed was burnt down (more likely due to Divine wrath) and on its site was built the Islamic Centre of Learning. I then asked my driver where all the ladies had gone to. He told me the name of another kampong but I cannot remember the name now.

However I noticed one peculiar thing. There were some youngsters about 20-21 years old running around and they looked exactly like my Chief Officer and Second Engineer.

Capt Oh Eng Hoe
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