

Tough stewardesses

By Halimatul Hamid

MENTION "flight stewardess" and most people would picture a flawless beauty with a warm smile greeting passengers as they board the plane. For others, it would be the sexy batik kebaya, or the crisp white-and-red combo, uniforms worn by female flight attendants of national carrier Malaysia Airlines, and the first low-cost carrier in the country AirAsia respectively.



RMAF flight attendants Sergeant Shaidatul Akma Kamarazaman (left) from 20 Squadron and Sergeant Rosmawati Jali from 2 Squadron at RMAF Base Subang. — Picture by Rosela Ismail

What about stewards and stewardesses in military aircraft? The first thing that would probably come to the minds of many would be -- are there any? The answer is yes. Meet Sergeant Shaidatul Akma Kamarazaman and Sergeant Rosmawati Jali.

Dressed in a green flightsuit, Royal Malaysian Air Force stewardess Shaidatul of 20 Squadron said the job required a lot of perseverance, and physical and mental strength. "Many have this misconception that one just needs to look pretty and have a nice figure to be selected. In the military, it's a different ballgame altogether. You need to prove your worth to be selected and for most of us, we are here through the recommendation of our superiors," said the 25-year-old.

Shaidatul said the toughest time for her in the Air Force was during basic training. She said the training was compulsory for all those entering the military. While in training, she was tested in jungle survival skills, marching drills, weapon maintenance, physical fitness and was trained in hand-to-hand combat. "It is tough and gruelling. If you can survive the six-month basic training, then you are ready for any challenge that comes your way," she said, adding that she completed her training at the military training centre in Ipoh.

Next was specialised field training at Alor Star Air Force College. There, Shaidatul received training to become an Air Force technician for 1 ½ years.

"I thought that I would be a technician after completing training. But I was

recommended to become a stewardess, which came as a shock to me as I did not know there were stewardesses in the Air Force. Initially, 10 were selected to attend stewardess or steward training but in the end, only six made it. I was one of them," she related. Besides being trained in grooming, serving and etiquette, Air Force flight attendants are required to follow strict emergency routines and would have to sit for an examination every time they were assigned to a different aircraft, she said.

In 20 Squadron, Shaidatul attends to high-ranking military officers on board the C-130H or Charlie. She is also involved in rescue and mercy flights. "Although my job requires me to be on 24-hour standby, I feel rewarded when I am able to assist in the rescuing of children with heart problems or to send medical aid to disaster-struck countries."

For 2 Squadron flight attendant Rosmawati, 28, the opportunity to serve and meet leaders of the country means a lot to her. The 2 Squadron only serves VVIPs and they include Yang Diertuan Agong Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah as well as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor

"We are also on 24-hour standby just like flight attendants in 20 Squadron. What makes us different is the way we serve our passengers. Food is served according to preferences. The food is prepared by another party. All we need to do is to make sure that the food is warm during meal time and make them feel comfortable throughout their journey," she said.

According to Rosmawati, there are four planes in 2 Squadron -- the BBJ 737, Global Express (BD700) Falcon 900 and Fokker F28. The planes cater to dignitaries of different ranks.

"Just like our commercial airline sisters, we, too, have night-stops, especially when we serve dignitaries travelling abroad.

When we are not flying, we would be doing paperwork or attending military drills like marching or shooting practice," she said.

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