

An Evening with Morse Road Gang Members

An Evening with Morse Road Gang Members After a few years of reminders to GT Tong and Fok Swee Yin to let me meet their gang members, I finally got an invitation one evening in March 2013 to meet them. I have named them the Morse Road Gang for all of them grew up on Morse Road. I managed to speak to a few of them in between many rounds of beer and mouthfuls of food provided by GT Tong. Here's what I found out.

Fok Swee Yin rose for apprentice to President of Keppel Cebu Shipyard, a softball player for the Pirates and used to be a band boy. More about him later. Wun Kum Chuen, Kam Fook and Kum Yue are the elder 3 of 7 brothers who lived in Block 13, 41 Morse Road. Kum Chuen and Kam Fook were apprentices at the Singapore Harbour Board while Kum Yue pursued the 5 year Diploma in Marine Engineering course at the Singapore Polytechnic and graduated in 1971.

On completion of his apprenticeship, Kum Chuen, the eldest, went to sea on Austasia Line and sailed 3 years before getting a land job at Salim's power plant in Java. (Soedoen Salim was Liem Sioe Liong before he changed his name to suit the Indonesian Government. In the 1990s, he owned the biggest power plant in Asia, generating 350MW. Power was mainly for a limestone quarry and cement plant.) He retired in 2001.

Wan Kam Fook after his apprenticeship was among a batch of 7 who joined the 3-year Trainee Technician scheme offered by Keppel Shipyard. Among other roles, one of the useful roles of trainee technicians was to be able interpret the work orders to the charge-hands who spoke only Cantonese. Among the 7 were Fok Swee Yin, Lee Yue Chong, Lee Chong Beng and Wong Hong Swee. At the end of the scheme, they would be eligible for appointment as Assistant Foreman.

According to Kam Fook, the pay was "OK-lah" but he was attracted to an advertisement put up by ESSO to recruit technicians. When he turned up for the qualifying test, he found "More than 1,000 applicants taking the test and only 110 would be selected. I was among the lucky few." Kam Fook probably did better.

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