A Random Selection of Hong Kong’s Super Typhoons between 1960s - 1980s

By Geoff Walker

Every year some of the world’s most horrific storms form over the Pacific Ocean before moving across the Philippines and then reforming in the South China Sea and making a devastating landfall on the coast of southern China. Measuring hundreds of kilometers in diameter, these meteorological super storms can create immense amounts of rain and with severe winds of up to 260 kilometers an hour. Over many decades Hong Kong has learned to adapt and prepare to cope with these typhoons, but the city still comes to a total halt when these significant winds arrive There follows a recap and summary of several of Hong Kong’s worst Typhoons during the period late 1950s - early 80s.

During Typhoons, the deep, landlocked bays of **Tolo Harbor, Plover Cove** and to a lesser extent that of **Mirs Bay**, flanked by high hills that protected a relatively safe haven from typhoons has traditionally been a favored location for ships seeking shelter from Typhoons. Situated to the north east of Hong Kong in what used to be known as the “New Territories”, close to the Tai Po area, it was often used to gain shelter from approaching Typhoons. Nestled amongst, and protected by, the Sai Kung promontory
this afforded some decent protection to ships. However, this was not always the case and groundings often followed the passage of a Typhoon, mainly due to ships dragging their anchors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Deaths, Injuries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>September 9, 1983</td>
<td>10 deaths, 12 missing persons, 333 injuries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>August 2, 1979</td>
<td>12 deaths, 260 injuries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elsie</td>
<td>October 14, 1975</td>
<td>46 injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>August 17, 1971</td>
<td>110 deaths, 5 missing persons, 286 injuries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>August 21, 1968</td>
<td>4 injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dot</td>
<td>October 13, 1964</td>
<td>26 deaths, 10 missing persons, 85 injuries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>September 5, 1964</td>
<td>38 deaths, 6 missing persons, 300 injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>September 1, 1962</td>
<td>130 deaths, 53 missing persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>May 19, 1961</td>
<td>4 deaths, 20 injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>June 9, 1960</td>
<td>45 deaths, 11 missing persons, 127 injuries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>September 22, 1957</td>
<td>9 deaths and 100 injuries</td>
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**Synopsis of Typhoons 1957 – 1983**

**Track of Severe Typhoon Gloria 1957**

**Severe Typhoon Gloria** formed to the east of Luzon in the western Pacific Ocean and tracked across the northern Philippines, intensifying as it progressed across the China Sea towards the Chinese mainland. On 22nd September 1957 the Royal Observatory in Hong Kong upgraded it to a “**Severe Typhoon**” just prior to the system making landfall. It had devastating effect on the infrastructure of Hong Kong.
The Typhoon Season in Hong Kong usually spans the months of May to October, with July, August and September being the most prolific months for Typhoons. In September 1957 Typhoon Gloria hit Hong Kong causing massive damage and many marine casualties, one of which was the grounding of the Dutch Cargo Liner “Tjibanjet” on the rocks near Lye Yel Mun (Devil’s Peak area) at the eastern entrance to Hong Kong Harbor. The ship had recently completed a voyage from Moji to Hong Kong prior to her being stranded during Typhoon Gloria.

The “Tjibanjet” lost both her anchors near Junk Bay during the Typhoon, and grounded heavily. She was successfully refloated in June 1958 and resumed service with her owners in May 1959 after substantial repairs. Following another 14 years of service, she finally met her demise in December 1973 when she was sent to Taiwan for demolition.

Typhoon Mary arrived on 8th June 1960 and was the worst Typhoon to hit Hong Kong in more than 20 years. Tremendous rainfall (more than 14 inches in 24 hours) together with winds of 119 kmh (64 knots), gusting to 194 kmh (105 knots) at times, recorded at Waglan Island, which gave it the infamous nickname “Bloody Mary”, a name which will go down in the history of Hong Kong.
Typhoon Mary, also known as “Bloody Mary” was an extremely damaging Typhoon in 1960. It began as a deep trough in the South China Sea. A tropical depression formed on June 2. It became a tropical storm on the next day, and received the name Mary. It slowly moved across the sea, strengthening to a typhoon. Mary made landfall in Hong Kong on June 8, then transited inland through Guangdong and Fujian provinces on the Chinese mainland. It reemerged back to sea north of Taiwan and moved in the direction of the Pacific Ocean, south of Japan, where it once again strengthened into a Typhoon temporarily, before weakening and becoming downgraded on June 12.

The Italian Liberty ship “San Francesco” sank in Hong Kong during the Typhoon. She was refloated but subsequently scrapped. The Hong Kong registered cargo ship “Shun Lee” was driven aground on one of the Pratas Islands in the South China Sea and was wrecked. Her crew abandoned the vessel and took to the lifeboats. Other notable casualties were the Panama registered cargo ship “Malaya Fir” and Hong Kong registered coaster “Wan Fu”, both became stranded on the Kai Tak Airport runway.

During the 1960s one of the most serious Typhoons to hit Hong Kong was Typhoon Wanda in September 1962. Not only was substantial damage sustained to the colony’s infrastructure but some 36 ocean going vessels were either driven aground or wrecked in the devastation in locations right across the then colony of Hong Kong. The deep, landlocked indentation of Tolo Harbor and Plover Cove, flanked by high hills that protect the snug anchorage from Typhoons, remained a favored haven for ships in Hong Kong. Located in the N.E sector of Hong Kong’s New Territories, it is usually available for vessels drawing up to 8m draft. Unfortunately, the topography of the area did not always offer the protection sought from the weather, resulting in numerous Typhoon casualties. Some of which are captured below.
The Hong Kong managed, but Panama registered, “Ocean Venture” wrecked at Tolo Harbor as a consequence of Typhoon Wanda which struck Hong Kong in 1962. This is just one of the many marine casualties derived from the Typhoon.

The old Panamanian registered steam ship “Crescent” wrecked in Hong Kong at Tolo Harbor due to a Typhoon Wanda in 1962. Not much protection or refuge from weather in this case.

The small cargo ship “Hai Jye” hard aground at the east end of Harbor Island, Plover Cove, in September 1962 as a consequence of the devastating Typhoon Wanda. She was just one of many ships stranded in the Tolo Harbor area.
Despite being considered a safe haven, regrettably not so for “Fortune Lory”. Pictured well and truly wrecked, again as a result of Typhoon Wanda in 1962.

1964 was the most active year on record for the Pacific Typhoon season with 39 storms having been recorded. Typhoon Ruby was the 2nd worst Typhoon to ever hit Hong Kong. This storm formed north east of Luzon, in the Philippines, on 1st September. It tracked westward across the China Sea, rapidly intensifying as it progressed and was finally categorized as level 4 on the Typhoon scale. It struck Hong Kong on 5th September, with winds peaking at 140 mph (230 kmh) causing catastrophic damage to infrastructure and shipping.
The small steamer “Juno”, (ex Bidela, ex Cardross). Although owned by an associate company of the Madrigal SS – Manila, she was regularly seen in Hong Kong at Yau Ma Tei anchorage. Tragically, she was lost in the South China Sea with all hands, in a Typhoon when on passage from Hong Kong to Brunei, during 1964 with a cargo of Cement, Bricks and General. Last heard of when she radioed being in the midst of severe Typhoon.

SS “Juno” captured steaming towards Yau Ma Tei anchorage in Hong Kong Harbor, during happier times.

Another marine casualty recorded during the 1960s. Pictured high and dry, the Hong Kong managed “Vinkon” in Tolo Harbor. At low water one could walk right around the vessel. A Bird’s Eye view for passengers on passing trains!

The commencement of a new Decade saw Typhoon Rose striking Hong Kong on 17th August 1971. Initially, this was classified as an area of unsettled weather to the west of Guam, later intensifying to a Typhoon on 10th August, before being downgraded to a tropical storm. Having again reintesified, after only a few hours, it was again classified as a Typhoon and named Rose. The Typhoon then tracked west north westerly towards the Philippines, crossing northern Luzon where it weakened and moving into the South China Sea. The storm gained intensity as it progressed across the waters of the open sea and finally struck Hong Kong on 17th August with winds reaching 278 kmh (173 mph) at Tai Mo Shan in the central New Territories. Typhoon Rose was the most violent and intense tropical cyclone to strike Hong Kong since Typhoon Wanda in 1962. The huge storm surge, coupled with heavy Seas proved disastrous to many ships offshore, at least 300 boats sank or were badly damaged by the typhoon and eighty-eight deaths alone, occurred after the Hong Kong-Macau ferry SS Fatshan capsized and sank. Damage to infrastructure was massive throughout the Colony.
A sad sight, to behold, shipwrecks on Lantau Island. In the foreground is the tragic remains (awash) of the iconic Hong Kong – Macau Ferry “Fatshan”.

The well known and much loved, “Fatshan” during happier years. She was easily recognizable steaming through Victoria Harbor on her daily trips to or from Macau.
A dramatic image of **USS Regulus** firmly aground on 17th August during Typhoon Rose, at Kau I Chau Island. The grounding caused massive hull damage to the ship and after 3 weeks attempting to salvage her it became obvious it was unviable and she was declared a total loss, subsequently being struck from the USN list. The vessel was progressively demolished in situ.

This weather system formed at a tropical depression south east of Guam on 24th July. After a period of uncertainty the storm regenerated on 28th, reaching Typhoon status on 29th. The storm was allocated the name **Typhoon Hope**, and tracked west north west passing through the Luzon Straits, south of Taiwan, and making landfall only 10 miles to the east of Hong Kong on 2nd August. This was to become the Colonies most devastating Typhoon since Typhoon Rose in 1971. Winds were recorded in Hong Kong at 205 kmh (125 mph), gusting to 240kmh (150 mph). The Typhoon caused havoc and was responsible for 112 fatalities and 260 injuries. Typhoon Hope quickly weakened over the land while moving westward, but retained its classic formation. Once over the Bay of Bengal the storm reintensified and moved over India where it finally dissipated.

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**Track of Super Typhoon Hope 1979**

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During Typhoon Hope one of Kowloon’s two Star Ferry piers in Tsim Sha Tsui, was seriously damaged when the powerless 10,000 ton Greek freighter Argonaut collided with the piers. Reportedly the ship lost its anchors and despite desperate efforts by the crew to avoid the Star Ferry piers, they were unsuccessful in their endeavor. The ship eventually came to rest hard up against Kowloon Public Pier, having sustained serious hull damage on her port side.

Left, damage to Kowloon Star Ferry passenger pier during the violent rage of Typhoon Hope and collision of the Greek ship Argonaut.

Typhoon Ellen was considered the worst typhoon to hit the China Coast since Typhoon Hope in 1979. This Tropical Cyclone formed well out into the Pacific Ocean on 26th August 1983. It strengthened and was upgraded to Typhoon status on September 4 as it tracked west-northwest when it became known as Typhoon Ellen.

Upon making landfall in what is now present-day China, winds gusted to 154 kmh (96 mph) at Stanley. Rainfall totaled 231.8 mm (9.13 in) according to Hong Kong’s Royal Observatory. Twenty-two ships were
wrecked, including a 21,000-ton freighter, forcing the rescue of all 40 crew members. Several less serious collisions were reported between ships.

Another casualty was the 185 ft (56 m) Barque Osprey which carried nine people, eight of which were lost. The sailing vessel (made famous due to the Jackie Chan Movie – Project A) had been at anchor in Repulse Bay on the southern side of Hong Kong Island, when the Typhoon was approaching Hong Kong. Apparently, according to reports, the vessel weighed anchor sometime in the early hours of 9th September, presumably heading into more open water. After that, little is known except she was presumed to have sunk 12 miles somewhere to the south of Hong Kong Island.

The Cypriot freighter City of Lobito (ex Lobito Palm) well and truly beached on Chung Chau Island as a consequence of Typhoon Ellen. The Filipino crew were rescued and cared for by local villagers until the storm had subsided and they were repatriated. The owners of the vessel were reported as having ceased operating soon thereafter.

This short summary by no means includes all the Typhoons experienced during the period covered or marine casualties sustained, but is only a random selection of some that made the headlines. Perhaps
they will give an insight to some of the devastation these super storms can create, perhaps nostalgia for others who may have experienced them.

The original “Kowloon Docks” at Hung Hom, on the eastern side of the Kowloon Peninsula. It was an easy landmark due to its massive heavy lift hammerhead crane, visible from almost any direction.

It is now the location of Whampoa Gardens, which is the largest private housing estate in Hung Hom, Kowloon. It was built on the exact site of the former Whampoa Dockyard.

Over many years the major Hong Kong shipyards obtained much business from ships becoming stranded by Typhoons sustaining damage as a result of grounding in and around Hong Kong’s waters, as well as other vessels salvaged in the South China Sea by the iconic Hong Kong Tug “Taikoo” operated by the China Navigation Company on behalf of the Swire Group’s Taikoo Shipyard.

Similarly, the Hong Kong Kowloon and Whampoa Dock Company (known for short as Whampoa Dock), situated in the Hung Hom area of Kowloon peninsula also thrived as a consequence. The Whampoa Dock operations merged with Swire’s Taikoo Dockyard to become Hong Kong United Dockyard on the new territories western shore of Tsing Yi Island, Wok Tai Wan.

A busy Taikoo Shipyard, at the original Taikoo premises in Causeway Bay, showing vessels of prominent Hong Kong owners’ utilizing the Dockyard’s extensive repair and maintenance facilities. It was later relocated and the area became known as “Tai Koo Shing”, a residential apartment complex and shopping mall.

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