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## Typhoon over Hongkong

A very strong typhoon hit Hongkong recently and I received a few videos which brought back a few memories. Among them I will mention another very strong typhoon of the '70s. At that time HKG was connected to the world with a submarine cable of a rather limited capacity and by two satellite stations of the first generation. They very large and when the wind was becoming stronger the dishes had to be locked in the horizontal mode and the stations were out of service.

All the traffic was type B only and many regional airlines did not have a switching computer yet. Take the case of Korean Airlines for instance they rented an AVD Seoul-Hongkong from Cable & Wireless, had a TDM, Time Division Multiplexer, at Seoul and all their traffic including the local one, was switched by HKGXS. Such set up was very efficient and working quite steady, except in case of typhoon over HKG.

One day we received the typhoon alert signal one. That was quite frequent in the summer and autumn seasons and did not involve any particular action. But that day the alert kept rising: signal 2, then 3 and so on and we kept Korean and other similar users informed. It was early evening and I was keeping contact with C&W to know if or when they were going to lock the antenna dishes. At the end no more doubt they were going to do it and I left my office since the wind was already very strong. In fact as soon as I had driven through Wong Nei Chong gap I realized that it was not going to be easy to get home with all kinds of flying objects hitting my car. I was living at Stanley Village and there was a military camp further down at the end of Stanley Peninsula. Actually I could see with my headlights that I was following a military car driving back to the camp. It seems to be an old Land Rover or similar, a relic of WW2. Then something unexpected appears in front of me: a broken branch of a tree was lying on the road, the military car stopped, a man opened a door which was torn away immediately by the pressure of the wind. In less than a minute that car had lost three doors and some pieces of iron sheet were flapping intensely in the wind. Now the rain was coming intensely too. Fortunately for them the military men had not been hit in the incident thank to their helmet and certainly a bit of luck. They managed to move the tree, re-started the amputated car and I followed. About a mile further I was home, or so I thought.

I entered the parking lot, there was a power failure in the area and no light. I parked my car facing the wind to protect the door when I will open it but the pressure on that door was so much that it took at least ten minutes for myself getting out of the car. One has to be in to realize the power of the wind. It is like facing the water coming from a fireman hose. Facing the wind inflates the lungs much more than comfortable, turning one's back to it forces them to empty which is as bad. One feels that the pressure even binds the nose. So I was in the dark, completely soaked. I knew the place well but it was impossible to stand up without holding something firm and there were only concrete walls. I think it took me half an hour to reach the staircase. Once in the flat with the wind turning around the building the air pressure varies constantly and I was feeling it in the ears like going up or down in a non-pressurized plane.

The next morning once the roads had been reopened, which is done quite diligently in Hongkong, I could see buses and trucks laying on their side having been overturned by

the wind, as well as small boats carried by the sea from the each to the other side of the road.

In the SITA centre the situation was back to normal. The quality of landlines was excellent and despite such abnormal events, line failures were really exceptional. As for the remote switching interruption we did not receive any complain, the airlines concerned had been advised in time of the situation and being located in the same geographical area they knew the power of a typhoon.

Four short videos (less than 2 minutes altogether) are accessible. The first one shows papers flying around a building. There are not garbage but the result of office windows being broken by the wind brining hell in such places with all papers and documents flying away !

The second video gives an idea of the power of wind and rain. Facing them during the day is already something but in the complete darkness at night is much worse.

The third video shows people emptying water from the balcony of their flat. That reminds me of a SITA story. We were waiting for an accountant. If my memory is correct it should be J Denis. But due to a coming typhoon the airport closed soon after his arrival and all hotels remained fully occupied by non-leaving passengers. So finally the accountant was lodged at the Local Representative's flat who was Sam Weller in those days. Soon after came the typhoon, one window gave away and the two men spent part of the night dealing with the water invading the flat !

Looking carefully at the fourth video you can observe that the building on the background is oscillating, while taking the one in the foreground as a reference. Such phenomenon is relatively frequent in Japan being generated by earthquakes and while sleeping in a high building one can be sent rolling on his bed from one side to the other. When a top grade typhoon is crossing a city it is exclusively the pressure of the wind that is binding a building made of steel and concrete, thus giving an idea of the energy dispensed by such typhoon.

Here is the link to the videos :

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/wyirtejcwetlzs/Typhoon%20over%20Hongkong.mp4?dl=0>

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