

# HONG KONG RIOTS 1967

*By Sam185*

There have been significant riots in Hong Kong a number of times, in 1956, 1967 and 2012. However, RELENTLESS was only involved in one of them; the riots of 1967.

Actually, there was rioting in 1966 but this was largely confined to 3-nights of disturbances in Kowloon after the Government approved an increase in the Star Ferry fare by 25%. Whilst this event in itself was fairly minor, the 60's in general was a period of mounting dissatisfaction with British colonial rule. The social unrest over working conditions, corruption in government and the police reached a boiling point in 1967, fomented by agitators who supported Mao Tse-Tung's government in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The PRC was in some turmoil at this time, the Cultural Revolution was in full swing and the Red Guards were carrying out purges and were involved in political infighting. This was the era of Mao's 'Little Red Book' and the pro-communists in Hong Kong, who had large numbers of workers in the shipping and textile industries, were members of Unions with close links to Beijing.

The initial demonstration of 1967 was a labour dispute in March at the Hong Kong Artificial Flower Works but spread to shipping, taxi, textile and cement companies as the leftists called for massive strikes and organised further large scale demonstrations. By May, the unrest had turned into rioting as demonstrators clashed with police and then leftists resorted to terrorist attacks with fake and real bombs. A curfew was imposed, all police forces were called in and British military units in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories were put on alert.

The Star Ferry was suspended at Curfew and demonstrators frequently tried dodging the patrols to cross the channel to Hong Kong Island in an array of sampans and junks to join in the rioting in Hong Kong.

Over 300 demonstrators were arrested in the ensuing weeks but the violence escalated quickly when hundreds of armed militia from the PRC fired at the HK Police in the New Territories, killing 5 policemen. Emergency regulations were granted by the HK Government allowing the police special powers to quell the unrest, leftist newspapers were banned from publishing and many leftist leaders arrested and detained, some of whom were later deported to PRC.

The leftists retaliated by planting more bombs - bomb disposal experts from the police and the British army diffused as many as 8,000 home-made bombs - but the police fought back by raiding leftist strongholds. In one such raid, helicopters from the HERMES were involved in landing police.

The terrorism and waves of bombings did not subside until October and in December the Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai ordered the leftist groups in Hong Kong to stop all bombings and the riots in Hong Kong finally came to an end.

By the time the riots subsided at the end of the year, 51 people had been killed, including five police officers. A British Army explosives disposal expert (Sgt. Charlie Workman of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps) and a firefighter were also killed. In addition, more than 800 people sustained injuries, including 200 law enforcement personnel and 5000 people were arrested. Bombings killed 15 people, and injured 340 others.

As a British Colony, until handed back to China in 1997, the RN maintained a squadron of minesweepers in Hong Kong in the role of offshore patrol craft, supplemented as necessary by other visiting British, Australian or New Zealand naval units.

It was unusual for there not to be at least one frigate or destroyer in the area but with the riots escalating into acts of terrorism, the local squadron was reinforced by a number of ships. These included the aircraft carrier HERMES; and so it was that the planned operational movement of RELENTLESS from Singapore to Manila was delayed and she was diverted to Hong Kong earlier than originally planned, in late September.

RELENTLESS arrived in Hong Kong in the early afternoon of 28<sup>th</sup> Sep and secured alongside the North Wall in the dockyard - HMS Tamar. Although leave was granted, the Internal Security (IS) Platoon was landed each evening along with IS Platoons from the other ships in harbour.

On 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, the Boarding Party was reinforced and briefed. Not that they would necessarily be boarding any ships, more that they would be preventing boarders getting on RELENTLESS...

At 1830 that evening the ship slipped from HMS Tamar and commenced patrolling a North-South line across the western entrance to Hong Kong harbour.

Other ships in Hong Kong were allocated different patrol lines, especially the channel which separates Hong Kong Island from Kowloon. After the evening's hostilities, RELENTLESS anchored overnight near Stonecutters and moved back alongside at HMS Tamar the following morning.

### ***As I remember it - Hong Kong Riots 1967 - AB Kev Perkins***

*My memory of this patrol are now very vague, but what I do recall is being convinced it was on Mao Zedong's Birthday, but it couldn't have been that as his birthday is in December.*

*But it must have been an important date as at our briefing earlier that day, the officer said that they were expecting a surge in violence and bombings, also that there would be up to 200 junks and sampans crossing from the mainland to Hong Kong. We were supposed to deter as many as possible, but we could not open fire on them, but we were allowed to use hoses when in close proximity.*

*At 1800 we sailed to our Patrol Line at the West Entrance to the Harbour, I was stationed between the funnel and the 4 inch Gun on the starboard side with fire hose at the ready. As it became dark the odd junk or sampan would appear up fo'rard and we would try to manoeuvre so as not to run them down.*

*I do remember a few getting close enough to throw fireworks or Molotov Cocktails at us, but with very little effect, they just bounced off our side and fizzled out in the water.*

*But a couple of the guys on the port side had said there was a lot more activity up fo'rard and they were thought we'd run a couple of small sampans down, but it was so dark, they couldn't be sure.*

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