



Service History of
681836 SAA Green, J. A. (John)
7th May 1956 to 15th August 1994



Note: Surname changed to Charlett-Green, September 1962.

1956-1959	RAF Halton	Technical Training Command	Apprentice Training (Engine Fitter)
1959	RAF Halton	Technical Training Command	Supernumerary.
3 May 1959	RAF South Cerney	Training Command	Aircrew Officer Training Course
7 May 1959	RAF Wattisham	Fighter Command	1st and 2nd Line Servicing – Hunter F Mk 6. 111 F Sqn. Black Arrows.
11 May 1961	RAF Wattisham	Fighter Command	Lightning F Mk 2 Propulsion specialist courses: RAF Melsham, RR Derby, Plessey Ilford, BAC Warton.
31 Oct 1961	RAF Leconfield	Fighter Command	1st and 2nd Line Servicing – Hunter F Mk 6. 92 F Sqn. Blue Diamonds. Lightning F Mk 2 propulsion specialist
30 Dec 1965	RAF Geilenkirchen	RAF Germany	1st and 2nd Line Servicing - Lightning F Mk 2.
14 Mar 1966	RAF OCTU Feltwell	Training Command	Officer Training Course – graduated Fg Off.
1 Aug 1966	RAF Lyneham	Transport Command	Supernumerary.
14 Sep 1966	RAF College Cranwell	Training Command	No 3 Engineer Officer Training Course.
5 Sep 1967	RAF Coltishall No. 226 OCU	Fighter Command	OC GEF. Management of Lightning mechanical component bays, Safety equipment bays, Station workshops, Ground equipment section, Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, Crash recovery.
3 Nov 1969	RAF Leconfield	Maintenance Command	Fl Lt. OC Lightning F Mk 6 Major Servicing Flight. Development of fuel leak repair

	No 60 MU		techniques.
17 Jul 1972	RAF Rheindahlen	HQ RAF Germany	Sqn Ldr. Desk Officer, Lightning F Mk 2A and Wessex Mk 2 Helicopters.
26 Jul 1975	RAF Wittering	Strike Command	Supernumerary while attending Advanced Maintenance Engineers Course, RAF College Cranwell.
27 Mar 1976	RAF Wittering No 226 OCU	Strike Command	Sqn Ldr. S Eng O Harrier OCU.
6 Apr 1978	RAF Staff College, Bracknell	Training Command	Advanced Staff Course.
23 Dec 1978	RAF Binbrook	Strike Command	OC Eng Wg. Operational Lightning F Mk 6 unit.
12 Jan 1981	RAF Halton No 1 S of TT	Support Command	OC No 2 Trg Wg.
28 Feb 1983	AFD HQ	MOD AFD	Air Eng 33. Reliability, Maintainability, Testability advice to Air Staff.
14 Jan 1985	RAF Uxbridge	MOD ADFD	RAF Support Structure Study Team engineer member. RAF Manpower economy study engineer member. The Garton Study, RAF member.
12 Aug 1986	AFD HQ	MOD AFD	Supernumerary with EFA Project Team, London and Munich.
17 Mar 1987	NEFMA Munich	RAF Support Command	Section Leader Air Eng 3, Reliability, Maintainability, Testability aspects of the EFA development contract
2 Apr 1991	RAF Brampton	HQ RAF Support Command	DEA for Jetstream, Bulldog and Air Cadet gliders. Command staff specialist officer for Jetstream, Bulldog, Air Cadet Gliders, Hawk and Light Helicopters.
1 Apr 1994	RAF Brampton	HQ RAF Support Command	Supernumerary – Non-established duties. Retired 15 Aug 1994.

RANK ON COMPLETION OF SERVICE

Wing Commander

AWARDS

MBE

POST HALTON CAREER

I spent the first month after graduation still at Halton, awaiting the start of Officer training as an Air Electronics Officer. I had said throughout the selection process in our last term at Halton, that I wanted to be an aircraft engineering officer. I was with several friends, Dave Green among them. I spent a lot of time in the School library, reading-up on electrical and electronic theory in preparation for my course. However, I was becoming increasingly unhappy at the prospect of a life spent in the back of a V-bomber. It was becoming clear that it would be a long way from my aim of being an engineering officer, and there was little realistic possibility of changing branches after completing the training. I arrived at South Cerney on 3 May and explained my feelings to the staff. They confirmed that there would be little chance of changing branches until I had amortised my training – several years. So I decided not to go ahead with AEO training and was sent back to Halton. To my surprise, the Wg Cdr who interviewed me was very reasonable, understood my reasons and wished me luck. And off I went to Wattisham and Treble-One – The Black Arrows.

The first memorable incident at Wattisham was standing on the ASP for the Annual AOCs Inspection parade. We were lined-up looking out at the runway, waiting for the AOC to fly himself in in a Hunter. As the aircraft rounded-out and settled onto the runway, small flames flickered from the bottom of the drop-tanks. The great man had omitted to lower the undercarriage. The aircraft was quickly recovered by Station Flight and the AOC duly arrived and did his inspection. Throughout, he behaved as though nothing had happened. The two drop-tanks were a write-off, but otherwise there was minimal damage and the aircraft flew out a couple of days later.

Having become proficient at all the engine change stuff, I was handed a new challenge by the Flight Sergeant. 'You've got long arms and you're slim. There's a mod to replace all the aluminium pipes in the starter system with stainless steel ones. Here's the first mod kit – the leaflet is on the desk'.

The leaflet was obviously written by somebody who hadn't done the job! Most of the pipes were reasonably accessible, but the union nut for the pipe from the bottom of the AVPIN tank at the very top of the starter bay was just about touchable with my finger-tips.

Eventually, after about a days work, I managed to cut the locking wire and loosen the nut. There had to be a better way. It really needed a big crow-foot spanner but our stores had nothing suitable. So I begged an old spanner of the correct size and went to station workshops. Could they cut the end off the spanner and weld it at right-angles to a 4-foot rod or tube. Then weld a Tee bar across the other end. I went back to the hangar and struggled for another day to install the new pipes. Next day I had what must have been the biggest Hunter special tool in the world. Most importantly, it did the job. The next time I removed the top pipe, it took about 10 minutes to cut the locking wire and 2 minutes loosen the nut. A bit longer to install the new pipe of course. So in the next few weeks, I worked my way through all 21 Hunter Mk 6s.

At some time during this early period, I decided to get an RAF driving license and subsequently added aircraft towing to it. Very useful to be able to tow an aircraft out onto the ASP and do a ground test of the engine or starter.

Between June and the end of September, I managed to fit in supporting air shows in Tours and Toul-Rosiers in France, an Avon 200 series engine course at Rolls-Royce Derby, a week at Farnborough for the annual air show and a Plessey AVPIN starter course at Plessey, Ilford. At Farnborough, we stayed at the Army School of Cookery – the worst food I have ever experienced in the RAF.

Then it was back to being a normal Hunter squadron and operation 'Fabulous'(FAB). This involved the electricians de-modifying the electrical aspects of 'Smoke' so that the gun firing system would work and the armourers removing the 'DERV' tank and installing the original ammo boxes. It also involved a couple of armed hunters parked at the end of the runway on telebrief during daylight hours. We poor souls took it in turns to stand-by in the adjacent hut and freeze to death.

Came December and we all went by rail to Aklington just north of Newcastle. Six hunters flew up as well. After about a week of air-firing practice, I was in SHQ getting some money, when the unmistakable sound of a large machine-gun firing rang out. I hurried back to the line to discover that one of our aircraft had fired about 20 rounds of 30mm ball ammunition, just prior to engine start. The pilot, Flt Lt Brian Mercer, had switched on the main switches and the guns fired! Fortunately all the ground crew were observing the rules for armed aircraft so nobody was hurt. However, the safe headings were all changed. The ensuing enquiry found there was an electrical fault, so Brian Mercer was exonerated.

Winter came to Wattisham with a vengeance in February 1960. Snow everywhere! Some bright spark thought it would be a good idea to use the ground-crew to clear snow for the ASP, taxi-ways and hangar entrances. After a couple of hours it was clear that this wasn't going to work. Then a Hunter was taxied out and started to try and blast the snow away. That resulted in an ice-rink! So we all had a tot of rum and returned to the relative warmth of the crew-room.

Some time early in 1960, I read about the requirement for NCOs to train as propulsion specialists for Britannia and Lightning aircraft. So I applied to become a Britannia propulsion specialist. That got as far as FS Dave Cooper, the sqn discip NCO. He took one look and said to 'Why do you want to leave Fighter Command?' Before I could answer he continued, 'Re-submit it for the Lightning. So I did – one of the best decisions I ever made.

June saw all the aircraft revert to aerobatic configuration and the radar, electrical and instrument guys who had been busy through the winter disappeared into their crew-rooms. In fact the aircraft were remarkably serviceable and we engine guys also spent a lot of time out in front of the hangar watching display rehearsals. Watching one of these on 10 June, the formation of 16 aircraft had climbed to the top of a loop prior to descending for a 'bomb-burst'. The aircraft disappeared briefly behind a wisp of cloud and as they reappeared, two aircraft broke away. One continued vertically into the ground, the other managed to recover and land. Sadly, the pilot of the first aircraft was unable to eject. This was my first experience of a fatal flying accident. It had a profound effect on the whole squadron. The next week was spent guarding the crash site, rehearsing funeral drill and trying to return to normal. Being tall, slim (and junior) I was an inevitable pick for the funeral guard of honour. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Stan Wood was buried in an area reserved for Wattisham aircrew in the graveyard at Ringshall Church, just north of the main runway. It was a very emotional occasion.

In no time at all, the squadron was back to normal with daily rehearsals for the pilots and the routine maintenance work in the hangar. There were also occasional shows at weekends to support.

I had been told that I had been selected to take part in the BBC programme 'Blue Peter', a very popular, weekly children's show hosted by Christopher Trace and Leila Williams. They were doing a short series called 'Life in the Royal Airforce'. The first episode was a pilot's life and our boss, Squadron Leader Peter Latham, was chosen to do it. The second week I was to give a ground-crew perspective and finally, Flying Officer Pamela Rich was to show that 'girls can do jobs which are just as important as men's'. The initial filming was carried out at Wattisham in June and the boss and I did the 'acting' to make short stories that we could commentate over during the actual show. My episode consisted of 8 segments. The first bit was debriefing the boss at the aircraft about a supposed problem. Then a close-up of me

setting switches in the cockpit. Next a more distant shot starting the engine and doing a slam check. Then shots of the aircraft being towed into the hangar. The aircraft in the hangar with the tail and the engine removed (it was a different aircraft of course). Then a short bit of talking about training at Halton. Then the aircraft being reassembled. Finally, on the flight line being handed over to the boss. All of which took a couple of days to film. They reduced what was probably an hour of cine to just over 3 minutes. I didn't meet Pamela Rich.

The actual live show for me was on Friday 29 July 1960. A couple of weeks later, a cheque pitched up out of the blue – no one had told me I would get paid!

About the same time, I bought a new, red mini. We were told we were moving to RAF Stradishall – about 25 miles west of Wattisham. The detachment was to last for 6 weeks while our runway was strengthened for the soon to arrive Lightnings. I threw my kit in the back of the mini and drove to Stradishall. The aircraft had already arrived, having done a display rehearsal at base before landing at Strad. We had been allocated a dispersal area on the far side of the airfield and an old tin hangar, about half the size of our standard RAF hangar at Wattisham. It looked impossible to get 22 Hunters into the hangar – it looked full with just four! So we pulled them out and started over. Fortunately, it's easy to push a Hunter with five or six people and we gradually maneuvered aircraft so that wings or tails were tucked between the large steel frames down each side that supported the roof. It took a while, but eventually they were all in – just. I'm pretty sure we broke a few RAF aircraft parking regulations and it was noticeable that none of the hierarchy were anywhere to be seen. We repeated the feat every flying day at Strad.

For Farnborough 1960, we stayed with the Army at nearby Bourdon Camp (good food!). On arrival I was greeted by a grinning friend who said 'wait 'till you see our favourite radar man'. Sure enough, there across the square was someone on crutches and with both legs in plaster. So we went over and I asked him what had happened and he said 'I woke up in the middle of the night, hanging onto the window sill outside. I thought I must be dreaming so I let go!' It was on the second floor and he fell into a concrete drainage channel, breaking both ankles.

This was to be the last Farnborough for the Black Arrows. As usual they put on an excellent, precision formation aerobatic display every day with 16 aircraft.

About this time, I was on camp one weekend when the aircraft came back from a display. Although I was off duty, I went out to the line to help with refuelling and turn-round checks. Doing the intake check on one aircraft, I could see some 'foreign object damage' in this case a definite nick in one of the first stage compressor blades. It was a big, clean nick – about 0.1" (2.5mm) high by 0.2" (5mm) deep, located about 2" (50mm) from the blade tip.

Anything causing that sort of damage would probably leave a trail of increasing devastation as it passed through the remaining 14 stages. So we took the aircraft back to the hangar for an engine change and the pilot took the spare aircraft. I didn't think much more about it until about a month later I got a 'Good Show' certificate from the Fighter Command Flight Safety organization, followed by a photo and write-up in the Fighter Command Quarterly Flight Safety Magazine.

At the end of September, we all flew down to Barcelona for what was to be the Black Arrows final display. As soon as the aircraft arrived, we swung into the usual drop-tanks off, refuel, after-flight routine before being taken to a hotel in the middle of Barcelona. We were sitting outside the hotel bar on the ground floor enjoying a cool beer, as were people in the adjoining bars and cafes. Suddenly, a scuffle broke out across the road between a couple of locals. Almost before we could understand what was going on, a police van screamed up and a couple of burly policemen jumped out laid into them with truncheons. Within seconds the two locals were thrown into the back of van and driven off to who knows where. We all decided

that getting involved with the police was a BAD idea in Franko's Spain!

Treble-One were due to get the Lightning Mk 1A in 1961 and I and several other ground crew were sent on Lightning courses at Rolls Royce in Derby and British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) at Warton in Lancashire. So, on 2 January 1961, I drove up to Derby for my second Avon course – this time the Avon 210 with reheat for the Lightning. Once again the course was very enjoyable.

For the two-week course at BAC, we would be accommodated at the RAF training school for medical orderlies about 10 miles (16 km) east of Warton. The course covered the engine and related components and the aircraft fuel and air systems. Perhaps the most memorable feature of the Lightning F1A engine installation was the cockpit throttle box. The box contained 2 handles, no1 engine throttle to the left, no 2 to the right. The handles ran fore and aft on rails inside the box. A spring loaded stop near the front to the box limited the throttle movement at 100% rpm – the full 'dry' power (No reheat). Pushing the throttle handle past the stop selected minimum reheat while the engine remained at 100%. As you pushed the handle further forward, the reheat would step through 4 separate stages to full reheat. Pulling the throttle back to the spring loaded stop gave minimum reheat. Pulling further back reduced the rpm progressively to 88% while remaining in minimum reheat. At this point, you had to press a 'piano key' in front of the throttle box and about 2 inches (50mm) lower. (It was the same size and shape as a 'Black Key on a piano). There were 2 piano keys, one for each throttle. We thought that it was an accident waiting to happen.

Sitting in the cockpit, with the throttles fully forward and hand on the throttles, it was difficult to see the keys. After a bit of practice, and knowing they were there, it was fine, but subsequent problems at RAF Leconfield in 1964 and RAF Lyneham in 1966 showed how dangerous it could be.