

Geoff Green 1933–2016



On the 12th July 2016, I flew from Sydney to Perth on the very day that the Russian pilot, Fedor Konyukhov, took off from Northam Airfield on his epic round-the-world mission in a Rozière balloon. But I was there for another reason: to attend the funeral of my very good friend Geoff Green.

How ironic that the Russian should take off from the same airfield that Geoff had used in the 1970s to set his own balloon records. Many members of the Western Australia Balloon & Airship Club (WABAC), were at the funeral to honour Geoff's life. His generosity and sound knowledge helped others to set their own records, including Gren Putland, Ron Taaffe, Adrian Clements, Geoff Tetlow and myself.

To have met Geoff Green was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. He taught me to fly a balloon over 40 years ago. He started the Hong Kong Balloon & Airship Club, the setting of many escapades and hairy moments chasing records. All club members were flying as crew with Cathay Pacific Airways and living in Hong Kong. Without a mention to the airline, Geoff ordered a balloon from Don Cameron in Bristol with the colours and logo of Cathay Pacific.

When the balloon arrived, the Director General of the Hong Kong Civil Aviation Department (HK CAD) intimated that no balloon would ever fly over the skies of Hong Kong. However, when the CAD chief went on leave, Geoff convinced his deputy to fly with him on the first free flight over Hong Kong, on Montgolfier Day in November 1975. Flying in the

New Territories was quite demanding, so the ultimate challenge was to amass five balloons for a free flight on Montgolfier Day, 1977. As the balloons were readied for take off near the village of Sai Kung, Geoff introduced the now seasoned Director General of the HK CAD to each waiting pilot. To our surprise, he gave us a bottle of champagne each, saying "If you land softly, you won't break it!" In his usual selfless way, Geoff let the club pilots have the honour of this occasion, while he and Ron Taaffe stayed on the ground.

The survivors' dinner was memorable. Only Geoff could make an arduous day of difficult retrieves into a humorous speech, with two balloons needing helicopter retrieves in the hills, another flying over the Pik Up prison and the other two in the water catchment area.

Geoff was born in Kendal, in the Lake District, and joined the RAF when he was a young man. He was in 208 Squadron, flying Meteors, and was stationed in the Middle East for 2½ years. He became an instructor on Chipmunks and Harvards and, after the RAF, had several jobs in aviation, before joining Cathay Pacific in 1965.

Geoff's other interest was acquiring vintage aircraft. He bought a Tiger Moth, a Hornet Moth and a BA Eagle. His other hobby was becoming a ham radio operator. In his radio shack in Hillside House in Sai Kung how often did his many friends hear the words "This is VS 6DA, Denmark America", his call sign.

He was never knocked back. From the humble beginnings of the HKBAC, the club's journey continues; this year marks the eighth Cathay Pacific balloon and Nigel Black, as President, as did those before him, has done a great job in continuing with Geoff's dream.

Paul Gianniotis

Eulogy by Geoff Green's daughter, Sarah.

"Dad's passion with flying and all things airborne inevitably led him to ballooning. He made the first free flight of a hot air balloon in HK. He was the first man to fly a balloon over Mount Fuji in Japan in 1975 – notorious for its treacherous air currents. In 1977, he broke both the British and World Altitude records in *Charlie*, in the AX6 class of balloon, climbing to 30,500ft.

In 1978 he broke both the British and World Altitude records in a one-man balloon, *Sprite*, in the AX4 & 5 class of balloons, where he climbed to 22,300ft – and really put HK on the world balloonists' map. In 1980 he broke the World Distance record in *Sultan* – a distance of 674.5km, flying from Northam to Zanthus in WA with Clemo [Adrian Clements].

This culminated in Dad's prize achievement: The Absolute World Long Distance Record, and he entered the *Guinness Book of Records* in the 1982 Edition.

Dad was presented with a Bronze Medal by the Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom – an award made for outstanding contributions to aviation – and presented to Dad by Prince Charles, then the president of the Royal Aero Club. He was later also presented with a Silver Medal by Prince Charles.

In 1990, Dad was awarded The Guild Sword of Honour by The Guild of Air Pilots & Air Navigators "For an Outstanding Personal Contribution to General Aviation".

Those are some of the facts of Dad's life, and some of his amazing achievements, which, especially in the case of ballooning, could not have been made without the loyal and dedicated support of friends and family."

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Left: Five balloons line up for a rare free flight in Hong Kong on Montgolfier Day in 1977, a landmark event that had been arranged by Geoff Green.