

## Geoffrey Garratt – Life Story – begun 1998

- Born:** Lithgow, NSW 17<sup>th</sup> December 1922. Siblings: Gwendolyn Joyce (1920) and Maisie (1924)
- Father:** Joseph Henry Garratt, Design Draftsman, Artificial Limbs, Lithgow, Small Arms Factory. His parents Joseph and Lily Garratt, 1 Cook St. Lithgow. Bootmaker and retailer. Joseph Henry “Harry” was born in Leicester UK (1897) and migrated with his parents about 1910 (actually 1913) (then aged 13) (actually 15). Only child.
- Mother:** Vera May Garratt nee Gittoes. Her parents, Frederick Hilder Gittoes and Catherine nee Dunbar. Dairyman Baulkham Hills, NSW. Her siblings, Peter and Percy (actually Eric and Percy) twins (not – Eric Raymond b. 1891 d. 1897, Percy Harold b. 1892 d. 1897) died of scarlet fever/diphtheria aged 6 ½ (actually rheumatic fever with complications) and 5yrs & 2 months. Spencer (Frederick Spencer), Sydney (real name Cyril Milton) and Mary Hilda.  
Family came from the Kangaroo Valley Area of NSW (actually from the Camden area).
- Education:** commenced state primary school, Canterbury, NSW 1928. Parents briefly ran small mixed business in that suburb, living above the premises. Approx. 1 year later, parents moved to Model Farms (now Winston Hills) near Baulkham Hills and primary school was at Northmead, about 2kms towards Parramatta. After some 2 years, parents secured tenancy of home at Thomas St Northmead close to the school. At 11 years of age, “graduated” from primary school and next year commenced at Parramatta State High School (co-ed). Left school at end of Year 4 aged 14. Further education detail later.
- Working Life:** commenced at John Connell & Co, wholesale grocers, Kent St. Sydney as office boy/mail and messages – some shipping documents etc. Enrolled in private college tuition to become accountant. After 3 months it became apparent to GG that this vocation was not suitable and resigned at the end of the year 1937. Enrolled at Metropolitan Business College in general business course including secretarial work (shorthand, typewriting and bookkeeping). End of 1938 secured position as Staff Office Assistant at Howard Auto Cultivators Ltd. At Northmead. Occupied this position for 3 years. Next job was with Rheem Manufacturing Co. at Alexandria as Assistant Paymaster. After some time was transferred to the production planning department. Early in this period, GG enrolled in matriculation studies at Granville Technical College attending at night. During 1942, a wartime initial course in production planning and control was conducted at Sydney Technical College and was undertaken and successfully completed. However, matriculation studies were interrupted and not in the event completed.
- War Service:** in November 1943, GG volunteered to join the RAAF as an air crew member and enlisted the same month. After initial training (education again) was sent to Canada to be trained as an air navigator. Most of this training was at Lethbridge, Alberta but some was at Edmonton. Subsequently posted to advanced navigation training at Dumfries, Scotland and Lethbridge, Birmingham – a Wellington training establishment (can't read next few words) a remarkable euphemism for what happened to me! Only the dregs – perhaps I was one of them -maybe because of my diffidence but maybe because of some deficiency in the self-preservation department. In any case, it appears I became a member of the crew least likely to go to war, let alone help to win it!

There were 5 other Australians – the pilot Bannerman from Sydney's middle west; a reasonable sort of fellow as a navigator (by this time I had specialized as a bomb aimer); a red-haired wireless operator; an upper gunner who had been in the army - Harvey – who had been given a military medal and a soft kid was tail gunner. We were posted to a 4-engine aircraft conversion unit at (I think) Scunthorpe and were most impressed as we bussed in by the enormous number of pranged Stirlings in the near vicinity of the aerodrome – nearly all of them had not burnt – just run out of puff! The Wing Commander in charge of the unit was Rollo Kingsford-Smith – not that he was in way significant to me – but he was involved in the subsequent incident which was to have a big effect on my future.

Our crew began all the usual exercises to prepare us for the eventual role we were to play in Bomber Command and we did a lot of navigational exercises, bombing exercises, flying on 3, flying on 2 (if you're lucky) and so on. After a couple of months, the navigator, Noakes, was smart enough to realise that it was a great time to have a dicky knee cartilage repaired and was able to drop out of the crew, being replaced by an Irish guy who was a bit of a worry. We staggered on doing our training but our results were getting pretty woeful and the crowning catastrophe was that one night we were simulating a bombing attack on Bristol but part of our radar navigation equipment was out of service so we needed to rely on dead reckoning for a large part of the trip. Although it was not apparent for some two hours, our Irish navigator gave the skipper a reciprocal (opposite direction) course to fly and the first landmark which I saw in the dark was Portsmouth and we were passing over it heading East! Arguments ensued and by the time the arguments looked like reaching a sensible resolution, we were flying towards the coast of France and were almost directly over the D Day convoy waiting to attack! Needless to say, the fireworks sent up to let us know we were not welcome were quite spectacular and resolved the argument quite quickly.

Very shortly after this, the rest of the crew had a night in the local village pub and resented being asked to leave at closing time so much that they threw beer mugs through the pub windows, then pinched potatoes from a farmer's field. On reaching the station they raided the sergeant's mess and stole the next day's meat ration. As our Nissan huts were widely dispersed around the aerodrome for safety, it was a long way to our hut so they decided to look for a vehicle. They found Rollo Kingsford-Smith's little staff car and were in the act of pushing it down the road when Rollo was alerted and came out firing his .33 pistol in the air. This very fine bunch of fellows then returned to our Nissan hut which was equipped with a solid fuel heating stove in the centre and proceeded to have a banquet of meat and potatoes. Next day the fun hit the fan and the culprits were called to front the station commander, a RAF Group Commander, who decided that the whole crew needed to be taught a lesson. We were to be sent to a disciplinary camp at Sheffield to do forced marches under full packs and all the other rather unpleasant things which are done to punish severe lack of discipline in archaic military establishments – for a month.

I did not relish this idea and decided I had had enough of these no-hopers anyway – I figured that if we ever did get into action, they would have little chance of survival and I probably may not achieve what we were there for. I asked for an interview with the Group Captain, explained my point of view and expressed a desire to get into the war which was what I had volunteered for. I told him I had a preference for

the Pathfinder Force and after consulting the bombing leader he agreed that my record was suitable.

After a week I was posted to a PFF training squadron (106) at Metheringham, Lincolnshire to take the place of a Canadian bomb aimer, Wally, whose performance had dropped to hopeless in the recent past. He had been dropping bombs more than 1,000 yards from the target. The crew which I was to join was on leave and arrived back in a couple of days. While I was waiting, I met a navigator called Vern Powell who was about to go on an op. We had been at initial training at Bradfield Park in Australia and at navigation school in Edmonton and I was looking forward to getting his insight into what went on. He didn't return. When my crew returned and I met them and the first afternoon we attended my first briefing for a bombing operation. After the usual preparation the op was cancelled due to weather, a frequent occurrence as discovered.

It was not for a few days that I went with this crew on an operation and it was my first time to enter a Lancaster so the baptism was a little lacking in confidence on my part that I know where the switches were etc.

This however was a crew! The skipper was an army captain wearing South African uniform called Dirk Lorens from Johannesburg. Tall, charismatic, willing to volunteer for anything. What a contrast! Navigator a school teacher in civilian life but a cool and precise Englishman. Bomb Aimer from Birmingham (I now became radar navigator/second navigator/second bomb aimer/second pilot. This last was most unusual because usually the flight engineer was second pilot but ours (English) had little air sense and so I became the substitute though I doubt that we would have been in safe hands in an emergency! The wireless op was an Aussie, Jake Godfrey, who was a drover from the Gulf country with a face like wrinkled tanned leather. What a character! Carried a .38 pistol when on ops and scratched a kangaroo on the tailplane before every op. The gunners were pommies in their 30s both of whom had been in the permanent RAF and had done tours of duty as gunners on the Indian North-west frontier. This crew went on six ops as part of 5 group Bomber Command and then we were deemed worthy of going to Pathfinder Training Unit to be further trained in target marking and illumination. This was a one-week intensive course in accurate navigation and flying techniques to suit the quite different circumstances in which we would be working. One of the highlights was a lengthy interview with the boss of PTU, Group Captain Don Bennet who "invented" the Pathfinder bombing techniques. This Australian was an RAF officer and had evaded capture after being shot down over Germany earlier in the war and had been five months in enemy territory before successfully getting back to Britain. He was obsessively preoccupied with hating the Germans and forcefully tried to indoctrinate us with the same level of hatred. It didn't work for me and probably not for the others I suspect. Our motivation arose from the necessity to defend against the aggression but any fierce revenge or hatred feelings did not somehow seem a realistic way for the future. We were civilian soldiers in the main – even the gunners- and just wanted to secure a decent peace so we could go on with our lives.

After my PFF training we were posted to 83 Squadron Coningsby which had been a permanent RAF establishment and had proper masonry buildings and so on which were much more comfortable than what I had experienced so far in wartime – dispersed bases with Nissan huts and very little by way of amenities.

From Coningsby we worked quite hard. Every day we did at least two hours training in the air, even if we were briefed to do an op that night. The regime was 7 days per week for six weeks with one week's leave after that. Before leaving the detail of the war, I might mention that the skipper was a great volunteer but also full of derring do. A favourite trick of his was to spot a squadron of Flying Fortresses or Liberators returning from a daylight sortie over France, fly along beside them and stop two engines on the Lancaster, put the nose slightly down and fly past them at 50 knots faster than they could manage. Another was to fly low over the Wash, a marshy area and see how much salt water he could get to splash the tail gunner with the slipstream. At one time there was an aircraft which the CO, a Group Captain, usually flew which was giving a lot of trouble and several times was judged unsafe after takeoff, causing the CO to be embarrassed. The maker, A V Roe had a few attempts to fix the way it was rigged and satisfied themselves it was rectified. Dirk volunteered to test the damn thing with an all-up weight including more fuel and bombs than specification allowed amounting to 1,000 lbs above regulation. Of course, he volunteered all of us with him. It all went well and the CO seemed to regain confidence in his aircraft because we had his company after that on the few ops we did until the end of the European war.

Before each op it was Dirk's command that we crew formed a circle with our arms around each other's shoulders and sing the Zulu warrior's war cry. Nothing interrupted this, CO or not.

One more anecdote and that's it. When VE day passed, the CO sent around a sheet asking for volunteers for service in the Pacific because the war against Japan was still going on. It was not intended to send all squadrons and aircraft to this theatre and he would like those who wished to go to have first preference. On the sheet were the names of all the squadron commanders and in a few days almost every Aussie and Kiwi, as well as some Canadians were on the list. There were no Pommies on the list and it left a bitter taste for those of us who had given our services to their European war while our own countries were under direct threat. This in what we regarded as the elite of the elite!

On leave it became a habit of mine to spend the week with Mr & Mrs Christie who had a mixed farm at Crossgates, Seamer just near Scarborough in Yorkshire. This came about through the Lady Ryder scheme which organized home stays for homesick military people. I found the Christies very hospitable and was welcomed back many times. However, Mrs C was a romantic matchmaker and wasted no time in introducing me to her niece, Kathleen Moore who lived in Scarborough. It was only a matter of time before I was being hosted by the Moore family in Scarborough and only visiting the Christies. The town had many attractions and diversions so it seemed a more desirable situation for all (?)

When VE day arrived and my return to Australia became imminent, the inevitable happened – I asked the 18 year old Kathleen Moore to marry me and come to live in Australia. She accepted and eventually came to Australia in 1946.

Return: home to Australia took a long time after VE Day where the Aussies cooled their heels in camps all over the south of England waiting for marine transport, of which there was a great shortage. It was not until February of the next year that I saw home after more than 3 years. The sight, sound and smell (eucalypt so strong it tore the heart strings!) of my sunny early morning sight of Sydney as we entered on the deck of the

	<p>tottering old Aquitania (steam, 4 funnels, long and narrow, refused insurance by Lloyds) was unforgettable.</p>
What now?	<p>I had applied for and been approved for a government funded re-education course in mechanical engineering but first it was necessary to matriculate. A short course to cater for this had been designed but its commencement kept being delayed. In the meantime, I had an interest in watchmaking, having been able to learn a great deal from a good watchmaker in Brighton while waiting for the repatriation which never seemed any closer at that time.</p> <p>A Swiss watchmaker called Aubert had a business in Parramatta and as I had bought the basic tools (lathe, staking tool etc. etc.) in London, I was able to work with him and then on my own for him and had developed the confidence and relative skill to undertake any repairs necessary to be in business. This was mostly in part time and spare time. At the same time I was able to work for a neighbour, Jack Haigh, who carried on an engine reconditioning shop and general mechanical engineering so my time was occupied with useful activity which was in harmony with my natural aptitudes. However, the news that my fiancée would arrive in a short time made it necessary to decide what must be done about providing for our future.</p>
Babes in the Woods	<p>About this time, an aunt by marriage, who was involved with my Uncle Sid in running a hotel at Copmanhurst near Grafton said it was almost impossible to get a watch repaired in town and I should investigate the opportunity. I did and fell for the beauty of the town, secured shop premises and returned to Sydney to await Kathleen's arrival and our marriage, only a week after her arrival. After a week of honeymoon at Newport, I whisked her off by car to Grafton. Talk about naivete, optimism, immaturity, irresponsibility, you name it – in retrospect it was recklessly absurd and must have been profoundly traumatic to this English rose. We arrived in Grafton with the shop rent paid for a month, 100 pounds worth of new watches for stock a second hand car and six pounds cash. At that time, it was not possible to rent any accommodation, even a room in a private house. For the first 3 months we lived at the Commercial Hotel where the accommodation was six pounds a week including meals. If a child of mine did such a thing I would probably have a nervous collapse! In the event my business gradually began to prosper and eventually we secured first a furnished room with use of conveniences, then a whole rented flat and eventually were able to buy a home site and build with rural bank finance a basic 3 bedroom fibro cement box which was called a house. Interest rate 4% reducible over 40 years. Cost about £1,500. At that time the inflation rate was about 6% p.a. so the community was really subsidising us into that home.</p>
Kids	<p>in 1948 (actually 1949) our first child, Ann, was born. In 1950 a second child, a boy, was born malformed (probably a severe case of Spina Bifida) and lived only a few hours. In 1952 (actually 1954) a daughter, Jill arrived. In 1954 (actually 1956) a son, Paul was born.</p>
City Transfer:	<p>after 10 years in Grafton, during which the shop in South Grafton where I conducted my watch repairing business was flooded 7 times and after the severe effects of so many floods in such a short time, coupled with a credit squeeze in 1952, it became clear that soon my business would fail. In 1956 I decided it was necessary to try to cut our losses and re-establish in Sydney, where at least I was familiar with the business environment and was able to board with my parents while doing so. After 6 weeks of trying, I was able to find work with a watchmaker called Paul Kelvin, located in what was then Her Majesty's Arcade between George and Castlereagh Sts,</p>

near David Jones main entrance. This involved working the retail end of the business during the day and at night working at home repairing watches on a set fee per job which was about one third of the retail price. The business had three or four other piecework watchmakers. Our advertising slogan was "we will repair your watch as good as or better than new". This lasted for about 18 months (?) when I took the risk of starting a discount white goods business in Paddington. (Ed. This was 'Buyrite')

Housing: it took 14 months to sell our house in Grafton due to the extremely depressed state of the town and during this time, Kathleen and the children were still there. I visited on long weekends but the strain of family separation can't be underestimated. It was not a good time for the children or Kathleen who had little in the way of a support network. We were fortunate (in 1957 ?) to be able to rent a semi detached cottage in Croydon (Ed. Croydon Park? 80 Carshalton St.) and move into that with our still rather basic furniture. House hunting took a great deal of energy but eventually we were just able to find and buy a 1920s double fronted bungalow in unimproved state at Cammeray.

School: the three children were able, when old enough, to attend primary school in Cammeray which was close enough for them to walk. As they completed primary school, the girls were able to attend North Sydney Girls' High and Paul North Sydney Boys' High both of which were outstanding schools. For the last 2 years of primary school, Jill, who was assessed as being exceptionally intelligent, was given the opportunity, and accepted placement in a class for 'opportunity' students at Neutral Bay primary school.

Further change: In 1959 I sold my interest in the discount business to a competitor as it was clear to me it was not going to be the fortune-making enterprise for which I hoped. In the same building as my business there was a real estate agent I had come to know who asked me what I intended to do in the future. As I had not made any decision, I replied I would probably return to what I knew best which was watch repairing. He (Andrew Vass) suggested I would probably be quite successful at real estate, that he had a vacant desk and telephone and why didn't I try to see if it suited me? (At that time, real estate salespersons were only paid a share of the gross commission and had to finance themselves for all expenses.) As I was at a loose end, I agreed to try myself out. After some weeks I found that I was being successful and decided to become serious about the industry, enrolling the education course conducted by the Commonwealth Institute of Valuers to become a property valuer. I formed a long term intention of establishing my own real estate agency on the North Shore close to where I lived. I had a friendly relationship with the manager of a L.J. Hooker agency in Chatswood through our attendance at valuation lectures and he invited me to work at his office so that I could familiarise myself with the area and in late 1960 I started with him as a commission salesman.

While working at L.J. Hooker, I met a former salesperson called Robert Hamilton who had taken a job with E.A. & F. Shead who were competitors. Robert was a congenial sort of person and kept in contact with us. He learned that I intended to establish my own agency and suggested we become partners because he also had that intention and felt that together, we would probably form a successful team.

Hamilton & Co: In 1961, Robert and I rented a small premises which had been the sample room of Drug Houses Australia in Help St. Chatswood (Ed. I thought it was in Brown St which has since become Endeavour St.) and after refurbishing it with our own labour, commenced trading as "Hamilton & Co". This operation was immediately successful

and in a few years we were the most active agents in the sale of redevelopment sites for the building of home units and in the sale of home units then built. As this pattern of redevelopment increased, it became clear that a great deal of activity was being focused on Waverton, Wollstonecraft, North Sydney, Neutral Bay, Cremorne and Mosman and so we established an office in Crows Nest which was central to that area. Robert managed Crows Nest but it soon became clear that more effort was needed to secure a profitable outcome so after about a year or so we appointed a manager for our Chatswood office which was solidly established and I joined Robert at the Crows Nest office and in a short time of increased presence and promotion, this also became profitable. Eventually, we established further offices at Drummoyne and Mosman.