



Louis Hargroves was born on the 10th December 1917 on the island of Mauritius. At the age of three the Hargroves family sailed to England, where Louis, and his two brothers Zozo and Tony, were sent to St. Augustine's prep school in Datchet, and then St Johns's College in Southsea.

Initially Louis was interested in farming, but having watched some soldiers training in nearby fields he was swayed. He was too old for Sandhurst so Louis got into the army through the Supplementary Reserve of Officers, and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 6th November 1936. The 1st Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment were at the time stationed nearby in Aldershot, so Louis decided it was them who he'd like to join.

In 1937 the South Staffords were training in East Anglia. One of the jobs for Louis and his fellow junior officers was to pay the battalion soldiers in the nearby Cambridge hospital. It was here where he first met a beautiful young VAD, who happened to be working at the hospital. He wasted no time and asked her if she'd like to play squash at the weekend. Fortunately for us all, Eileen Anderson accepted.

On Louis' 21st birthday he learnt that he had passed his exams for a regular commission. The icing on the cake was that his first posting was to be with the South

Staffords in India. On Louis' return he was promoted to a Major and got engaged to Eileen. They were married on the 11th November 1940 at The Franciscan friary, in Chilworth, near Guildford.

Over the next 2 years of the war Louis served as part of the inland-security in Kent, Chepstow, and then in Wales. It was from here where he drove Eileen, during an air-raid, to Cardiff Hospital. Driving with Louis was a white-knuckling experience at the best of times, but they managed to navigate through the bombs and blackout, in time for Eileen to give birth to their first daughter Elizabeth.

In February of 1942 the Battalion became airbourne with the glider division. And after a year of Louis's strict commando-style training at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, the Airbourne division left in 1943 on the Stirling Castle to cross the Mediterranean. The soldiers soon managed to make their camp comfortable thanks to the Arabs who would find anything in exchange for cigarettes and chocolate. Louis even managed to get his hands on an old German troop carrier: He painted it yellow, named it 'The Yellow Peril' and drove his fellow soldiers to the coast each day to freshen up and swim.

After a month of this training they were given their orders which were to invade Sicily. As they crossed The Med the turbulence in these light gliders was horrifying but fortunately on landing (crash-landing in Louis' case) Sicily was freed with little resistance. Louis had, however, been one of the lucky ones. Of the 108 gliders that took off, 50 of them did not survive the turbulence and fell into the sea, and 25 were

never accounted for. Louis lost many close friends on that day, but was cheered up on his return to England to meet for the first time his second baby daughter Jane.

On VE day - the 8th May 1945, the airborne division was ordered to fly to Oslo to take the surrender of the German forces in Norway. After a week of their arrival they were told that Crown Prince Olaf was to return to Oslo. Louis' company were given 24 hours warning to act as his guard of honour. They rehearsed the men throughout the night and on the day they did the army proud. Louis flew back from the Oslo celebrations for the birth of his 3rd daughter Marion. 50 years later in 1995, Louis and Eileen were asked to return to Oslo to mark the Norwegian half century celebrations of freedom from the Germans.

In 1948 Louis was serving in The Rhine. It was here where he was able to really delve into his passion of shooting. He never liked fishing; by his own admission he didn't have the patience and never caught a single fish, but his shot gun brought him more rewards. In his memoirs he even went to the trouble of listing everything he ever shot. We know this list was accurate and honest as it includes in his hits, not only his loyal and embarrassingly disobedient gun-dog, but, his faithful wife Eileen too!

Promotion soon followed, as did his fourth daughter Philippa, and after a year with the South Staffords in Egypt, he was told that he would be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and be given the honour of becoming the first Commanding Officer of The Staffordshire Regiment.

In 1960 Louis was ordered to take his battalion to Kenya, where he formed a strategic reserve base-camp on Eileen's Brother's farm at Rongai. As well as a bit of peace-keeping; - climbing, hunting and shooting trips were embarked on which Louis loved. Boxing matches against the King's African Rifles also took place, one in which the Stafford heavy-weight champion, you'll all be delighted to hear, knocked out, none other than a certain, Sergeant Idi Amin!

The start of an undiagnosed illness in Kenya saw Louis having to relinquish his command of the battalion. However, once fully fit again he was given the officer training job at Sandhurst in March of 1962. A year later Louis was given the news that he was to command the British garrison in Aden as a Brigadier. This was described in Louis' recent obituary in The Times as a 'no-win' situation, but Louis enjoyed the challenge, enjoyed the people and played some memorable tennis matches as he tackled the job with his usual determination, and after two years was awarded a CBE for his efforts.

Louis' deafness was now becoming a problem so his final posting in 1969, at the age of 52, was to be the Brigadier AQ at the northern command in York. Here the day-to-day regime was fairly relaxed allowing plenty of time to shoot duck, snipe, pheasant, partridge and hopefully nothing else, but on one such shooting party, it was Louis this time, who was shot in the leg by another, rather well lubricated brigadier. Louis still managed to drive himself to York hospital where a rather fierce looking Matron greeted him and made him sit in the waiting room and keep quiet, because the hospital was expecting, at any minute, the arrival of a very badly wounded Brigadier!

Louis left the army in November 1972 at the army retirement age of 55. He straight-away was given the fund raising job for the central funds of the Conservative party. However, his army retirement and new job with the CBF was not the end of his military career. The Queen had approved of him being made Colonel of the Staffordshire regiment which he did proudly for two terms. As Colonel of the regiment Louis had a lot to do with Sir Arthur Bryan, the Lord Lieutenant, so in 1974 he was also made Deputy Lieutenant of Staffordshire.

After 20 years in the Tory job, Louis had built up the Midlands into the second largest donating area, second behind only London. One memorable fundraising story was that Louis introduced one of his industrialists to the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. After the meeting, Maggie kissed the wealthy industrialist goodbye, who promptly then gave Louis a ten thousand pound cheque. Louis then arranged for the same two to meet the following year and this time, straight after the meeting Louis was handed a fifty thousand pound cheque. Louis, never one to miss a quip, quickly asked Mrs Thatcher what kind of goodbye she gave him this time to warrant the extra forty thousand pounds?! Needless to say, the iron lady was not amused! However, in a letter Eileen received from the Conservative party after Louis' death, it was noted how fond Lady Thatcher was of Louis. His sense of humour and 'joie de vie' won him friends throughout his life

Towards the end of his time with Conservatives Louis was asked to be non-executive chairman of the Kelly Group, which he gladly accepted. This job also meant that he was given a very large smart Mercedes. I remember this car well as on one visit to Hyde Cottage Grandpa showed me his new car with a school-boy-like excitement,

and told me he'd take me for a ride. I was instructed to sit on the backseat while he went to put his chauffeur's uniform on. He re-appeared in his head-to-toe gorilla outfit, and then took me on a hilarious drive around the Cotswolds. Whenever we passed anyone walking down the road, he would lower the electric windows and wave. The looks on their faces was priceless.

In 1987 Louis was awarded a Knighthood for his political services to the Midlands and as a leaving present from his Conservative friends and colleagues, he and Eileen were given a cruise to Mauritius, to coincide with his 75th birthday on 10th December 1992. This was the only time he returned to his birthplace and was a very special time for Louis.

Louis lived out his last 15 years in Gloucestershire, where in the words of Rudyard Kipling, he made himself 'a partner in the Glory of the Garden'. He turned Hyde Cottage into a beautiful Cotswold setting, which frequently turned heads of passers-by, and gave him many hours of pleasure. His last days were spent in Nazareth House here in Cheltenham. Eileen was with him right to the end. A marriage that spanned 68 years and that was rewarded with four wonderful daughters, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He was a distinguished officer; a 'Valiant Heart', and dedicated his life to soldiering and securing peace for others. He at last has finally won peace for himself, and the words of the next hymn could not be more fitting: 'Tranquil you now lie, your Knightly virtue proved.'

Jeremy Houghton 16.04.08