

# 2001 Lt. Colonel John W. Russell

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Distinguishing himself as both an outstanding officer (he was awarded the Purple Heart, the Soldier's Medal and the Bronze Star in World War II) and gifted equestrian, John Russell has the unique distinction of having ridden both on the last official U.S. Army Olympic Team (London, 1948) and the first "civilian" U.S. Equestrian Olympic Team (Helsinki, 1952). The '48 Army squad was a powerhouse, and Russell, with his three-horse string of Air Mail, Rattler and Blue Devil, stood out, winning four individual competitions at Lucerne, the Daily Mail at London, and leading his team to victories in the Nations' Cups of London, Dublin and Lucerne. (Double clear rounds on the latter occasions earned him the Best Individual Rider award).

Though the Team disbanded after the Olympics, Russell continued to compete overseas, winning the 1949 Prize of Paris, the Puissance class in Vichy, and helping his team win the Prize of Nations in Paris. Eventually he was reassigned to Pennsylvania, where a chance encounter with Col. John Wofford (himself a veteran of the 1932 Olympics and the first president of the USET) alerted him to the possibility of trying out for the 1952 Olympics. The trials were at Fort Riley and Russell placed first on Col. F.F. Wing's 1948 Olympic mount Democrat.

In 1951 he won the West Point Challenge Trophy in New York on Blue Devil and in 1952, on Rattler, became the first foreign (non-German) rider (and Rattler the first foreign horse) to win the coveted Hamburg Spring Derby. At the Helsinki Olympics, on Democrat, and joined by Arthur McCashin on Miss Budweiser and Bill Steinkraus on Hollandia, he helped the infant USET win the Bronze Medal in show jumping in its first appearance in the Games.

In 1954, Russell was ranked the fourth most successful rider in Germany. He represented the U.S. as an individual in the 1955 World Championships at Aachen before joining Bert de Nemethy's first USET squad, touring Europe in preparation for the Stockholm Olympics. Military duties precluded Russell from competing at the Games and led to his eventual retirement as a competitive rider.

Reassignment in the U.S. as Officer in Charge of the U.S. Modern Pentathlon Team maintained his relationship with the Olympics, both as an officer and later as civilian coach of the team. His 1978 Pentathlon team included Greg Losoy, the first American in 60 years to win the individual and team World Championship titles. Russell has trained many civilian riders and horses. He has two sons who carry on his name in the horse business.

