

2018 Colonel John W. “Gyp” Wofford



Born in Laurens, South Carolina, in 1898, Colonel John W. “Gyp” Wofford left his mark on the sport of Show Jumping as an Olympic rider and coach and as the first president of the United States Equestrian Team (USET).

He was a keen horseman from an early age. He attended South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Military College and graduated from Clemson University in 1918 before attending West Point from which he graduated in 1920. He then attended the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas. He exhibited talent and enthusiasm for the sport and was selected by General Harry Chamberlin for the US Army Horse Show Team in 1929. Three years later, he rode as a member of the Show Jumping team at the 1932 Olympic Games.

After World War II, the Army withdrew from competitive equestrian activities, but Wofford continued his enthusiasm for the sport. He played a lead role in the founding of the United States’ first civilian equestrian team, and became the USET’s first president. In this role he faced, and overcame, many challenges. Besides finding ways to finance the team, he also developed an organizational structure, found top horses and riders willing to commit to the extensive training and traveling involved, and conquered the logistics of sending teams across the Atlantic to compete. He used his family’s Rimrock Farm near Fort Riley as a training center and provided the team with three Event horses and Bill Steinkraus’s show jumping mount, Hollandia.

Wofford coached the Show Jumping and Three-Day Event teams in the USET’s initial Olympic appearance at the 1952 Games in Helsinki, Finland, winning team Bronze medals in both disciplines with his eldest son “Jeb” riding on the Eventing team at only 19 years of age. The team also placed sixth in the dressage competition. In 1953, Wofford was elected to the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) executive committee.

Wofford and his wife, Dorothea, had four children – John Edward “Jeb”, Dodie, Warren, and James “Jimmy” Wofford, all of whom learned to ride almost as soon as they could walk. Gyp passed away in 1955, but the family legacy was carried on. Warren was first reserve to both the U.S. Show Jumping and Eventing teams at the 1956 Olympics and Jimmy went on to a Hall of Fame career in Eventing, riding on the 1968 and 1972 Olympic teams as well as being named to the 1980 team prior to the US boycott. Jimmy won two Olympic team Silver medals and one individual Silver medal. He also competed in the 1970 and 1978 World championships, winning individual and team Bronze medals.

