

## Lones Wigger: Legend Lost

1937-2017

*“We can say with great assurance that he didn’t make a dime over his 20 years of practicing tens of thousands of hours of shooting. He didn’t do it for the money. He did it – as the ancient Greeks did – for the glory of sport.” - Dr. John Lucas, Ph.D., an Olympic historian on Lones Wigger’s induction to the Olympic Hall of Fame in 2008.*



Ret. Army Lt. Col. **Lones W. Wigger**, a four-time Olympian and the most decorated shooter in the world, passed away on the evening of December 14, 2017 at his home in Colorado Springs, Colorado of complications from pancreatic cancer. He was 80 years old.

During his induction to the Olympic Hall of Fame in 2008, Wigger’s daughter and 1983 Pan American Games teammate, Deena, said her father “has paid more back to the sport of shooting than he ever got out of it.” Wigger’s illustrious international shooting career spanned 25 years and saw him winning 111 medals and setting 29 world records, along with winning two Olympic gold medals and one silver.

Though with all his accomplishments, the generations of young shooters who continue to reap the benefits of his hard work and love for the sport all say the same thing – ‘Wig’ is the best.

Wigger’s mark on the sport reaches far beyond his international shooting career. After a distinguished 26-year career in the U.S. Army, Wigger retired in 1987 and went to work for the NRA as the Director of Training for the U.S. Shooting Team until retirement in 1994. Right up until his death, he was active in growing the National Junior

Olympic Shooting Program, volunteering and organizing countless shooting matches, serving on the USA Shooting Board for various terms through 2016, even coming to work daily at the USA Shooting headquarters and managing the USA Shooting Alumni program.

“If you hear me speak about Lones, you will not hear me use Lones or Wig, you will hear me call him ‘Wiggles,’” said 2012 Olympic champion Jamie Corkish. “Wiggles is a true legend. He not only was an amazing shooter in his Olympic career, but he continued to win long after his International retirement. What a true champion, mentor, friend and legend.”

“How do you define ‘The Best Ever?’ Would you add up the total medals won to see who is on top? Would you add up the total number of years he has dominated his sport? Would you take a survey of everyone who has been his competitor, to determine who received the most votes? Would you look at the number of national and world records held? Not only is Wigger the only name at the top of these lists, no other shooter even comes close,” said two-time Olympic medalist and 1972 Olympic teammate Lanny Bassham.

In honor of his achievements and in celebration of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on August 25, USA Shooting renamed the interior of its headquarters and upper range the Lones Wigger Legacy Hall and Range. Wigger also wanted his legacy to also benefit young shooters and the Lones Wigger/USAS Jr. Olympic Endowment was established to grow youth shooting programs. To date, more than \$225,000 has been raised and will impact junior shooting for years to come. “Everyone here knows what it takes to be a champion or a success in life,” Wigger told the more than 300 attendees at that dedication ceremony. During the 30 minutes he spoke, he honored his family, teammates, friends and coaches for 25 of them. He only credited himself with his drive to train hard. “There are no secrets. It takes hours and hours of hard work, commitment, dedication, sacrifice and desire. Maybe desire is the most important. Everyone can be a winner. It just depends on how bad you want it. Never forget to dream. Dreams can and do come true.”

Wigger started shooting in his childhood home of Carter, Montana where his father, Lones, Sr. ran the local rifle range. A lifelong baseball fan, no youth baseball programs existed in the area, but young Lones wanted to be competitive and picked up his first rifle. As only Wigger could say in his trademark, cut-and-dry kind of way, “I just got started and I made it up.”

“[My father] would have to come in at night and pull me off the firing line, say we’re closing the range tonight and that we’re going home, otherwise I’d practice all night long,” he said. “I really took to it, and it was fun and I enjoyed it.”

From there, Wigger always wanted to shoot with the best. He went on to Montana State University where he earned a degree in Agronomy, as well as All-American Honors for three years. He later entered the Army in 1960, then commissioned to the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit. He would later also serve two tours in Vietnam.

“The Army and the Army Marksmanship Unit gave me the opportunity to train, compete and the support you couldn’t get anywhere else and I’m thankful for that,” Wigger said. “That allowed me to become the best I could be. Shooting is not a sport you can shoot on weekends and win – it’s full time. It’s a full-time effort. You’ve got to work hard, have desire, to do what’s necessary to get there, and it’s hard work. There are not many who have the fortitude to do the hard work necessary to excel.”

Wigger became the only athlete to win medals in all three Olympic rifle shooting disciplines and was selected as one of the U.S. Olympic Committee’s 100 Golden Olympians in 1996.

Wigger is survived by his wife of 59 years, Mary Kay, his two sons Ron and Danny, daughter Deena, son-in-law Tom, as well as two grandchildren.

***Funeral and memorial services will be announced. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested donations to the [Lones Wigger/USAS Jr. Olympic Endowment](#).***