

MARTIAL ARTS BIO: Tola (Toby) Ethridge Lewis, Jr.

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ELIZABETH CITY - Tola "Toby" Ethridge Lewis, Jr., age 75, of West Main Street Extended, Elizabeth City, NC died July 19, 2020 at his home. Born in Columbia, SC on July 7, 1945 to the late Tola Ethridge Lewis, Sr., and Hettie Willetts Lewis, he was the husband of Emily Stevenson Lewis of the residence. Tola was the Director of Veterans Affairs until his retirement. He was a member of Corinth Baptist Church, the Fellowship Sunday School Class, and the NC Baptist Men's Disaster Relief. Tola belonged to many organizations including the Albemarle Sound Base NC Submarine Veterans, American Legion Post # 126, American Legion Post #126 Legion Riders, and National Karate Jiu Jitsu Union. Many accolades and awards were bestowed upon Tola such as being the recipient of The Order of the Long Leaf Pine, Hanshi Tola E. Lewis 9th degree black belt Shito-Ryu-Karate-Do, was the second director of NKJU, and received the NKJU Certificate of Merit.



In addition to his wife, he is survived by two sons, Toby I. (Diana) Lewis and C. Andy (Jessie) Lewis; a sister, Angela L. (Elwood) Conary; and his grandchildren, Christian Feliccia, Isabella Lewis, Angelina Lewis, and Penny "P J" Lewis. He was predeceased by a sister, Anita Moreland; the mother of his children, Mrs. Martha C. Lewis; and his stepfather, W. Ernest Lewis.

Memorial services will be conducted at 3:00 p.m. Sunday, July 26, 2020 at Corinth Baptist Church Gym with the Rev. Dr. Farren Roper officiating. The family will greet friends from 1:30 p.m. until the service. Inurnment will take place at Coastal Carolina State Veterans Cemetery in Jacksonville, NC. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the NC Baptist Men's Disaster Relief Fund in care of Corinth Baptist Church, 1035 US 17 South, Elizabeth City, NC 27909. The family will receive visitors at 1615 West Main Street Ext., Elizabeth City, NC 27909. Twiford Funeral Homes, Memorial Chapel, 405 East Church Street, Elizabeth City, NC is serving the Lewis family. Condolences may be expressed to the family by visiting www.TwifordFH.com.

Tola "Toby" E. Lewis, Jr., born on July 7, 1945, in Columbia, South Carolina, came into the world as one of the early "baby boomers," while his father was serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. His childhood took him briefly through Chicago, Illinois, Wilmington and New Bern, North Carolina, before his family finally settled in Raleigh in 1948. There he grew up, attending Mt. Vernon Elementary, LeRoy Martin Junior High, and graduating from Needham Broughton Senior High School in June 1963. That same year he entered East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina, where his life's great passion truly began. Under Sensei Bill McDonald, he started serious martial arts training in Goju-Shorin Karate-Do—an experience that would shape not only his life, but the lives of countless others. He went on to earn his Bachelor's degree in 1972, majoring in Geography with a minor in Geology, pausing his training only briefly to complete active duty in the U.S. Naval Reserves in the Submarine Service.

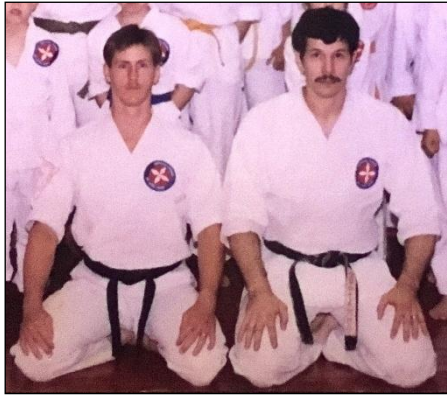
In 1972, while working with the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs in Elizabeth City, position he would hold until his retirement in September 1996, Sensei Lewis continued his martial arts journey under Sensei (now Pastor) Barry McCarty in Motobu-Ha Shito-ryu Karate-Do within the Seishinkai Martial Arts Union (SKKU). When Sensei McCarty left to pursue his ministry studies in 1974, he entrusted his dojo to Tola Lewis. With humility and a deep sense of responsibility, Lewis Sensei renamed it the Elizabeth City School of Karate, carrying forward not just a school, but a living tradition. Around this same time, from 1964 to 1974, Richard P. Baillargeon was serving as the Japan-USA Seishin-Kai representative for the late Soke Shogo (Kosho) Kuniba, laying the groundwork for what would soon become one of the defining relationships in Tola's life.

In 1974, Soke Richard Peter Baillargeon founded the National Karate Jiu Jitsu Union (NKJU). Lewis Sensei's dojo was 'among' the first to join. From that moment forward, Tola's heart belonged to NKJU and to Soke Baillargeon. He was not just a member; he was a devoted student, instructor, and loyal supporter of Baillargeon's vision. As an NKJU dojo head, he trained under the now-Soke Joseph R. Ruiz of Valdosta, Georgia, in Zen Shoto-Kai Karate-Do, Koga-ryu Kobudo, and Nippon Katsu-ryu Kempo until 1985, and he continued to train periodically under Kuniba Soke until Kuniba's passing in 1992. For Tola, these men were not just teachers; they were family in the truest martial sense—guides, friends, and fellow travelers on the path. He cherished every moment on the dojo floor and carried deep respect for every martial artist who shared training time with him, whether beginner or master.



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When Soke Baillargeon passed from this life on February 14, 1989, Tola E. Lewis, Jr. stepped forward to protect and continue the organization that his beloved teacher had built. Appointed by Baillargeon as his successor, Tola became Nidai Kaicho, the second Director of the National Karate Jiu Jitsu Union, and guided NKJU from 1992 to 2016. In 1994, his decades of dedication were recognized with the rank of 9th dan (kudan) and the title of Hanshi, formal acknowledgements of what his students already knew: he was a master in skill, but even more, a master in character. He remained a steadfast member of NKJU from 1974 onward, dedicating 57 years of his life to the martial arts and to the people who walked that path with him.



On March 12, 2016, after many years of teaching, leading, and nurturing the NKJU family, Hanshi Lewis chose to retire from active teaching and organizational leadership. True to his nature, he did not simply step away, he ensured continuity. He appointed his most senior student and first black belt, Steven E. Johnson, as his successor and Sandai Kaicho, the 3rd Director of NKJU. In doing so, he honored the legacy of Soke Baillargeon and entrusted the future of NKJU to someone he loved and believed in. When Tola E. Lewis, Jr. passed on July 19, 2020, in Columbia, South Carolina, he left behind not just titles, ranks, and dates, but a living legacy: an organization he cherished, a lineage he protected, and generations of martial artists who knew, without question, that

their Hanshi loved NKJU, loved Soke Baillargeon, and loved every single person who ever shared the mat with him.

