

Sharpshooter trains National Guard soldiers
The Applesseed Project aims to improve members' marksmanship skills

By Bethany Nolan



BLOOMFIELD — The tiny business card Ed Yeager hands out has all the usual accoutrements: name, phone number, Web site. But on the back is a dark square, one inch by one inch.

That's one of the target goals for riflemen involved in the Revolutionary War Veterans Association's Applesseed Project, which aims to teach advanced marksmanship skills to anyone who wants to learn. (That minuscule square? You're supposed to be able to hit it at 25 yards using a GI sling and iron sights from a prone position. Five times.)

Yeager, a 46-year-old Bloomfield resident, has been interested in target shooting nearly all his life.

He shot in high school in Daviess County, and was a member of the Sycamore Valley Gun Club. Back in 2006, he ran across an article about the Applesseed Project and visited a shoot in Evansville. He was quickly hooked by the program, which meshes marksmanship training and a sense of how important sharpshooters were to America's tumultuous creation.

Yeager became an instructor for the program and, in that capacity, recently traveled to Fort Stewart, Ga., for a week to train South Carolina National Guard troops before those citizen soldiers deployed overseas.

"One of our instructors is active duty military," he said. "He'd run his unit through one of our courses and their marksmanship improved. Word got around."

Volunteer instructors like Yeager paid their own way to Georgia, which piqued the interest of the Guardsmen. Then, interest skyrocketed as the citizen soldiers saw their own skills increase during the training, he said.

Yeager said instructors typically set a "baseline" at the beginning of the exercise, and then have participants take aim at those same targets at the end of the program to see how much they've improved.

Skills taught include how to properly use a sling — or strap — on a rifle. "It's an excellent steadying tool," Yeager said. "And it's a skill not a lot of people are taught anymore."

There are also tips on breathing (regulate it so your body's movements don't interfere with your shot) and natural point of aim (which sounds complicated, but essentially involves making your body comfortable so you can shoot better).

Those tips may sound simplistic, Yeager said, but "when you're shooting at something hundreds of yards away, every little bit counts."

Although most events are conducted at a lesser range, participants are taught fundamental skills that allow them to be accurate to 500 yards, a length traditionally known as the "rifleman's quarter mile."

The Appleseed Project said the National Guard unit's average improvement was nearly 300 percent over what its members had previously experienced.

"For regular citizens, this is kind of a fun skill," Yeager said of the marksmanship training. "But for those guys, being able to make the shot when they need to, it's a matter of survival."



Find out more: [Visit the Appleseed Project on the Web at The Appleseed Project](#)