

## ***The Knox Update*** ***From the Firearms Coalition*** **Giving Thanks – At An Appleseed Shoot**

**By Chris Knox**

(Phoenix, Arizona November 29, 2009) Thanksgiving is a time for reflection on our blessings, including the blessings of liberty and on the sacrifices our forebears made for us. With that in mind, son Brandon and I wrapped up our Thanksgiving observations slung into battle rifles on the firing line at the beautiful, newly remodeled and re-christened Joe Foss Shooting Complex near Buckeye, Arizona. As I concentrated on sight picture, breathing and trigger control, I was truly thankful.

Over the past four years, as regular readers of this space will be aware, a group that goes by the delightfully seditious name of “Revolutionary War Veterans Association” has spread across the country with a simple but ambitious goal: To turn the United States once again into a nation of riflemen. Barely on the radar of the mainstream shooting organizations, and totally off the major media’s screen, the RWVA’s Applesed Project has quietly grown at exponential rates.

The Appleseed shoots are superficially similar to any other shooting clinic. There’s a lot of shooting and a lot of discussion of sight picture, breathing and trigger control. But Appleseed adds another dimension: One of historical perspective. Between each relay, along with the shooting fundamentals, there’s a discourse on events in and around Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts on April 19 and 20, 1775. Along with the history lesson, comes a discussion of what it means to be a rifleman, what riflemen have meant to America, and what our rifles should mean to us.

It’s strong stuff. But there’s not a whiff of extremism. It’s simple application of the Second Amendment: The Right to Keep and Bear Arms only takes on meaning if we are skilled in the use of arms. Come to think of it, some politicians might consider the Appleseed message dangerous. Good. That’s exactly how they should perceive it.

The message is resonating – and gathering momentum. In 2006, the first year of the program,

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there were 18 events with just over 1000 participants. 2007, the year I shot my first Appleseed, saw 47 events and nearly 1900 participants and everyone was amazed at the growth of the project. In 2008 there were 138 events training some 3700 participants. 2009 should close out with nearly 400 events in 46 states training 10,000 participants. The goal for 2010 is to double 2009's record.

This past October saw the biggest single event in Appleseed history when RWVA volunteer instructors trained some 600 members of the South Carolina National Guard at Ft. Stewart, Georgia. These citizen-soldiers had been working regular jobs but had been mobilized for deployment to Iraq. A member of the battalion staff did not feel that the troops had been adequately trained in riflery and asked the RWVA for assistance. National Guard troops view themselves as inheritors of the minuteman tradition, so the historical perspective of the program had special significance for these soldiers as they prepared for deployment.

The mechanics of the shoot are straightforward. The objective of the course is to get participants to a "Rifleman" level – that's scoring a 210 or better out of a possible 250 on a modified Army Marksmanship Qualification Test (AQT) target. Most of the shooting is at an AQT target with multiple silhouettes scaled to simulate distances out to 400 yards. The reduced AQT target allows the entire course to be fired at 25 yards with any rifle from full-sized battle rifles to .22 caliber rimfires. The reduced range also allows for more shooting, and practice on the 25-yard course, with whatever rifle, has been proven to improve shooting at real distances with centerfire.

Brandon and I banged away at our targets with a couple of historic rifles, he with an M1 Garand, I with an M1903 Springfield. We had demonstrated early in the day that both rifles would shoot, turning in some promising groups, but neither of us managed to put together a string that would earn a Rifleman patch. But "a rifleman is persistent," as the Appleseed instructors constantly reminded us. The day will come. Meantime, I'm going to invest in some battle sights and a sling for my 10/22.

The future of the Appleseed Project looks bright. With over 170 events already scheduled for 2010, there will be an Appleseed shoot within a few hours of just about anywhere in the lower 48 states. Check their calendar at <http://www.appleseedinfo.org/> and start planning your Appleseed weekend. Get a few buddies together or take the family. The cost is modest and the shooting instruction is outstanding, and geared to any level. But the bonus is the historical view that puts shooting in a context that "sportsmen" or competitive shooters may not have thought about. Shooting is not golf. Appleseed reminds participants of the purpose of the rifle: To secure liberty.

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