

A person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, an orange hat, and large green earplugs is aiming a handgun. They are wearing black gloves. In the background, there is a sandy shooting range with several targets on stands. A shadow of the person is cast on the sand in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

Learning to stand
and deliver. Notice
shadow of ghostly
Revolutionary War
Minuteman looking
on with approval.

The Appleseed Project

Turning
America Back
Into A Nation
of Riflemen

Father and son rifle team fires for effect.



America was once a nation of riflemen, which meant much more than just being men with rifles.

» BY STEWART RHODES

To paraphrase the late Col. Jeff Cooper, merely owning a rifle no more makes you a rifleman than having a piano makes you a musician. But a rifleman is more than a skilled marksman. He is also ready and willing to use his rifle for its intended purpose—to defend life and liberty against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

As Col. Cooper also said: “Pick up a rifle and you change instantly from a subject to a citizen.” A student of history, the Colonel understood the fundamental necessity that a free people, if they are to remain free, must be a nation of riflemen, keenly aware that their rifles are the final guarantors of liberty.

America was once such a nation, but that awareness and tradition have been in steady decline, slowly strangled by apathy, neglect and the willful, criminal exclusion of our own heritage from public schools, where children are intentionally kept ignorant of the American Revolution, and where skill with a rifle

is certainly not listed among the essential “life skills.”

But it is not too late to turn the tide, to once again make America a nation of riflemen “who know very much what they are about,” as one British officer described the men of April 19, 1775 who “gave ball for ball,” as they swarmed around the retreating Regulars all the way back to Boston.

TURNING THE TIDE

The Appleseed Project, the brainchild of “Fred,” of Fred’s M14 Stocks, is a nationwide grassroots program of volunteer instructors from the Revolutionary War Veterans Association, with the bold goal of doing just that—transforming America back into a nation of riflemen, one group of Americans at a time, by conducting two-day rifle clinics across the country.

Appleseed, now in its third successful year, aims to give the average American the ability to pick up any sighted-in,

rack-grade military rifle and, with iron sights and surplus ammunition, consistently hit a man-sized target out to 500 yards, from field firing positions and under time pressure. As the Appleseed folks put it, “This 500-yard range is traditionally known as ‘the rifleman’s quarter-mile’ because a rifleman can hit just about any target he can see. This skill was particularly evident in the birth of our country and was the difference in winning the Revolutionary War.”

Imagine what this nation would be like if most Americans could do that, and also knew their heritage. That is why this is no mere shooting program. This is a path back to regaining an essential part of what it means to be an American. True to the spirit of the Revolution, Appleseed instructors teach both the skills of a rifleman and the heritage. It is that unique combination, and the soul-stirring experience of like-minded Americans coming together—all seeking the same revitalization of both skills and

heritage—that make Appleseed special.

Appleseed is truly a grass-roots program. It is not sponsored by any major organization, nor is it a for-profit business. The instructors are volunteers, traveling and teaching on a shoestring budget because they feel a burning sense of urgency and personal obligation to ensure that Americans preserve their heritage while learning the nearly lost art of the rifle. Most of the instructors started out as Appleseed students and then resolved to spread more “rifleman seeds” by teaching others. After you attend an Appleseed or two and bring your skills up to rifleman standards (or if they are already there), you too can become an instructor and plant some rifleman seeds of your own.

Fred’s goal is to reach the average citizen, “wake up his sleeping inner American,” and transform him into the rifleman he is supposed to be. To do this, Appleseed is intentionally kept cheap and easy for anyone, of any skill level, to attend. You don’t have to be rich, or even comfortably well off to attend an Appleseed. For the paltry sum of \$70 for two days of instruction over a weekend (which barely covers costs), students get world-class instruction in fundamental, traditional rifleman skills, along with a healthy dose of the history of April 19, 1775. Anyone under 20 years old shoots free, so bring your kids and grandkids.

An Appleseed clinic can be held literally anywhere there are Americans who want to learn. You don’t even need a range, just a safe place to shoot out to 25 yards with a decent backstop. You can shoot with a .22, Granddad’s old bolt-action, an SKS or any other rifle, as long as it is safe and works. So, while it is certainly true that some rifles are better than others, with superior triggers and sights, what counts most is what you can do.

While attending the Boulder City, Nevada, Appleseed clinic in October 2007, I used an old .303 Lee-Enfield bolt-action I bought from a Montana farmer for \$100. Would I have shot better with the AR-15 I loaned my brother-in-law? Perhaps, but what really matters is I improved as a shooter. So don’t wait until you have your ideal dream rifle to attend an Appleseed. Bring what you have,

Sarah Brady’s worst nightmare: children learning to shoot rifles, learning their heritage, and having fun doing it!



with 300-400 rounds of ammo, and work on you. If you show up, you will learn.

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

A two-day Appleseed clinic begins with a talk about the significance of April 19, 1775, when “the embattled farmers stood, and fired the shot heard round the world,” and the great sacrifices and daring of the Founding generation. Such storytelling and discussion about that first day of the American Revolution are sprinkled liberally throughout the weekend. This is no accident. These talks do far more than teach the students about their heritage. They give context to what the students are practicing and why.

Before we fired a shot, Fred recounted how John Adams, many years after the Revolution, wrote that later generations would never truly know the great sacrifices the Founding generation made to win our liberty, and how he hoped we would never forget it, lest all their sacrifices be for nothing. Fred reminded us that what they did was extraordinary. In rebelling against King and Parliament—the world superpower of the time—they kicked open a door to a dark, unknown future, and then boldly stepped into that perilous unknown. We can look back with the knowledge that they won, but on that cold grey morning of 1775, there was no guarantee of victory. To the contrary, all the odds seemed stacked against them. They nonetheless resolved to win their freedom or die trying, because for them, the cry of “give me liberty, or give me death!” was no mere slogan.

Fred told us that if we let our heritage die, if we forget what they did, and why, and let the flame of liberty go out, then what Adams feared will have come true and all that those men suffered and dared will indeed have been for nothing. Fred urged us to honor them by remembering, and as we shoot, to keep always in mind our sacred obligation to carry on the tradition.

It is difficult to put into words what it is like to hear a talk like that, to recall the great gift of liberty we were given, to imagine being in their shoes, facing what was commonly thought to be certain death by British bayonet or ball, and then to train in the tradition of the rifleman with that image in mind. It made for a special experience.

BY THE NUMBERS

Appleseed teaches the six fundamental steps of firing an accurate shot: sight alignment, sight picture, respiratory pause, focusing the eye on the front sight while focusing the mind on keeping the front sight on target, squeezing the trigger straight back, keeping the eyes open when the hammer falls while “calling the shot” and holding the trigger back for proper follow-through. Students also learn natural point of aim, stable field shooting positions and how to use a GI sling as a shooting aid. They then practice doing all of the above for each shot, while being given helpful hints as needed.

Appleseed uses scaled-down targets designed to present the shooter, at 25

yards, with the equivalent sight picture of silhouette targets at 100, 200, 300 and 400 yards, respectively. You may scoff at the idea of shooting such reduced-size targets at 25 yards, but if your rifle is not properly sighted in, or if your fundamental shooting skills are not up to speed, you will be mighty embarrassed by that seemingly humble target! If a range allows for it, the second day may see some longer-range work, but the basics of accurately shooting a rifle can all be taught at 25 yards. If you can't shoot a one-inch group at 25, it does little good to move out to 300 or 400. Shooting at 25 yards also allows the .22 shooters, including totally new shooters, to work on their fundamentals right along with shooters firing centerfire rifles.

Appleseed gives you all the knowledge you need to shoot an expert rifleman score on the traditional Army Qualification Test (the AQT). Then it is up to you to practice till you can actually do it. This is a great deal harder than many experienced shooters in the class expected, including yours truly. You can learn more about the AQT and the schedule of upcoming clinics by visiting the Appleseed discussion board at <http://www.appleseedinfo.org/smf/>.

Lest you think that you are above this course because it is "basic," remember it is the basics that win fights. If your basic skills are not sound, then all the high-speed, low-drag advanced training in the world is not going to save your hide. As one of the instructors put it, the better term for what Appleseed teaches is "traditional" rifle skills, like your grandfather learned.

The quality of instruction at Appleseed clinics is excellent, fully on a par with what I have seen in classes at Thunder Ranch, Front Sight, Gunsite, and elsewhere. Certainly, if you can afford to attend such schools, you should (I have my eye on Urban Precision Rifle), and Appleseed is not a replacement for those other courses. Rather, Appleseed serves as a complementary program with a different focus, emphasizing the fundamentals of marksmanship with iron sights at distances that fall between more specialized CQB and long-range precision rifle classes. Appleseed serves as a great foundation for wherever else you want to go.

STAYING ON MISSION

Keep in mind that the mission of Appleseed is to make every American a rifleman again. To do this, Appleseed needs to at least double the number of students taught each year. It went from 1,000 the first year to 2,000 the second, and is on course for 4,000 the third, and needs to go on doubling until the number of re-awakened riflemen is in the hundreds of thousands and then the millions. If we do that, we can give the anti self-defense Nazis like Brady, Rosie O'Donnell and Chuck Schumer rabid foaming fits while restoring our heritage—and have great fun doing it.

That is why, even if you are already a high-speed "operator," you should still

show up, bringing your friends and family, and especially your kids, to set them firmly on the rifleman path, and then "enlist" as a volunteer instructor and do your part to plant those rifleman seeds far and wide. We owe the men of April 19, 1775 at least that much effort to save what they fought so hard to give us.

I'll be there. Will you? ☺

SOURCE:

Revolutionary War
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