

The Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter of the IWLA

Celebrating National Shooting Sports Month and a Life Well Lived -- The Ernie Meier Memorial Trapshooting Event

The Fredericksburg-Rappahannock Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America has a large parcel of historically significant land located on the edges and between two major battles of the American Civil War. The first was the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863 where the tract of land was on the edge of the battle which raged just several miles to the north and east. Just a year later, in May of 1864 at the outset of the Overland Campaign by Union Army forces led by Ulysses S. Grant, the Battle of the Wilderness raged on the western edge of the property. Near the end of the battle the middle of the present-day chapter property served as a field hospital for a few days tending to the wounded soldiers evacuated from the battlefield. Today, gunshots can again be heard on every day of the week as the members of the Chapter use the four ranges on the property for pistol, rifle, and shotgun target firing.

Realizing that August of each year is the month the nation celebrates National Shooting Sports Month, we issued an electronic mail call for our membership to register for a trap shoot at our range devoted to shotgun activity. While this was an invitational event for Chapter membership, we also used it for attracting local non-members and for the recruitment of prospective members. We asked that each member bring a non-member, and advertised that the Chapter would provide all the clays, shotshells and a meal consisting of hot dogs, chips and a soft drink. Our planned date for the shoot was set for August 15, 2020.

The chapter's shotgun range used for trapshooting was a project conceived several years ago by a quartet of members that enjoyed the skill of shooting clay targets. Land was cleared and a permanent clay thrower was installed, along with a solar panel to maintain the charge on the battery used to power the device in the remote location. More recently, a shelter was installed as a Scout project, and power supplied to make the primitive site a little more civilized. The site was dedicated to the creators of the site who had the desire to improve the facility. In the intervening years two of the original "Four Musketeers" have died. The four were honored with a plaque on the recently constructed pavilion shelter:



Figure 1 Pictured are Mark, the son of the late Doug Crane, Ernie Meier, Fred Marshall, and John Undari at the dedication of the pavilion shelter at the Shotgun Range.

With the most recent passing in mid-July at the age of 88 of Ernie Meier, a retired USMC Lieutenant Colonel, we decided to make the Outdoor Sport Shooting event a memorial to the creators of the site and especially the memory of Ernie Meier.

Many of the shooters gathered for the event were relatives of Ernie Meier and are carrying on in his tradition. It is said that Ernie, even in his late 80's never missed when shooting clays.



Figure 2 Ernie Meier Shooting Trap on Range 4 at an earlier date

Planning for the event was not without its challenges. There was the heat of summer, the social distancing demanded by the covid-19 virus and, not the least, rain. We had

to postpone the shoot twice due to rain when we fell into one of those patterns with rainfall on the weekends. We had nearly 50 entrants for the event and were able to maintain essentially the same registrants over the month of delays. The event ultimately was held on September 12.

Even September 12 was questionable weather-wise and the planners watched the weather forecasts nervously in the preceding week. Friday was a beautiful day with plenty of sun but Saturday started heavily overcast with storm clouds and drizzling but as the day went on the drizzle subsided and the clouds remained with a light wind blowing from the west across the range. The weather was finally ideal for an outdoor event. We conducted the shoot over a 4-hour period in very comfortable weather and were able to provide a memorable event for participants from ages 9 to 90.



Figure 3 Trap range on September 12, 2020

For the event, the range was configured to allow the launching of up to three and maybe five clay targets at once... making it exceedingly challenging. If any shooter cared to attempt to shoot consecutive clays for an award, the chapter had "IWLA 25 Straight" patches to award to those members that can shoot 25 straight clays without a miss.

Everyone appreciated the ability to come to the chapter for an organized event and are looking forward to an annual event celebrating the outdoor shooting sports. It was a successful event as shown in the selected photos of the members, guests, and Range Safety Officers that planned and orchestrated the event. It can be honestly said that "A good time was had by all," and a fitting memorial to Ernie Meier.



Figure 4 An introduction and a range safety brief provided to each of the four relays in the 4-hour event



Figure 5 One of the original group of four taking his turn on the firing line.



Figure 6 Another member drawing a bead on a launched clay target



Figure 7 Preparing a new shooter for first time shooting experience (she did well).

On September 12, 2020, gunfire was heard once again near the hallowed ground of the Civil War, but this gunfire was without malice and served as a celebration of the heritage of outdoor shooting sports and hopefully served to promote that legacy.