

CHAPTER | | |-------------| | FOUR | |-------------|

Caching and You

Ray Wilson travels often on business to Washington, D.C. As a professional geologist, he feels it is important to keep in touch with members of his profession in the National Geological Survey Office. Taxpayers cover his travel expenses, so Dr. Wilson can think of no valid monetary reason for not taking the trips as often as possible.

On one such trip several years back, Wilson, the admittedly small-town boy, decided to stop at a drug-store on Wisconsin Avenue, in the heart of Georgetown, at about 10:00 P.M. On his way into the store from the public sidewalk, he found it necessary to wade through a number of D.C.'s finest, most persistent, obnoxious panhandlers. Being from a part of the western United States where these sorts of people virtually do not exist, Wilson was not equipped to deal with the situation in which he found himself.

Sensing his fear, the moochers pressed him vigorously, ignoring other potential donors. Two of them stood together in the middle of the sidewalk, effectively

blocking his way into the store. Somehow these people felt Wilson owed them money, a claim they pressed even more vocally and physically when they realized he was uncertain about the situation. Once inside the store, the now very shaken Wilson tried to persuade the store manager that he had been the victim of a rough, dangerous encounter. He pleaded with the manager to call the police.

"They won't respond even if I do call," the manager explained patiently. "What are you, some kind of hick? District police only look into holdups of more than five hundred dollars, shootings, or major drug deals."

"But I can't go back out there again," Wilson pleaded passionately. "They will tear me to pieces."

"If they do tear you to pieces, then the police will investigate, but I suggest you wait here for fifteen or twenty minutes and then leave with several other customers," the manager persisted.

Finally that's what he did. Wilson walked out of the store with a group of Washington natives who knew how to deal with panhandlers. On the way back to his hotel room, Wilson vowed never to let such an incident happen again. Lesser people might have settled for a relatively wimpy can of tear gas or some similar device, but not Wilson. He was an exploration geologist, accustomed to wild and wooly situations.

I got involved when Wilson asked me to sell him a small handgun. In the course of the sale, he told me about the incident in Georgetown and explained how he planned to deal with this sort of thing in the future. It was interesting to keep track of events as they unfolded.

When Wilson flew into our nation's capital, he always went through National Airport. From there he took a taxi directly to the Key Bridge Marriott where, for reasons of access, cost, and comfort, he liked to stay. Washington, D.C., is packed full of hotels, but for those who have not stayed there, the Key Bridge Marriott is

characterized by larger than normal gardens and sundry strips of shrubbery, many of which are inside the hotel along various courts and walks that are out of sight from any but those few guests who use them.

At the time this incident occurred, the airlines did not fluoroscope or otherwise examine checked baggage to any great extent. Wilson put his pistol and a box of ammo in his suitcase and sent it on through to National Airport. As was his custom, he stayed at the same Marriott outside of Georgetown.

However, this time Wilson retrieved the pistol from his suitcase and carried it with him in an ankle holster as he went about his business in D.C. He knew which buildings were protected by metal detectors, so he would leave the pistol in his briefcase with a security officer when he went through a security system.

When ready to leave the city, Wilson inspected the two clips, wrapped the pistol and ammo in rust-inhibiting paper, and sealed both in quality plastic bags he had purchased just for this occasion. After sealing up the bags, he buried them about twelve inches deep in one of the Marriott flower beds. He picked a place where there was a distinctive mark on the wall to facilitate finding his cache the next time he came to D.C.

Whenever Wilson arrives in D.C. now, he simply retrieves his piece, performs any necessary cleaning, and goes about Washington equal to any three muggers. Today, Wilson maintains significantly increased peace of mind while moving around from place to place in the big city. (Someday a Bernard Goetz-type incident may occur, and Mr. Wilson will fault me for putting his account in print.)

By caching in a common area such as a flower bed, Wilson does not have to worry about requesting the same room in the Marriott every time he comes to town. Above-ground locations might work, but the chances of having his pistol discovered in the course of routine



This Walther PPK with extra magazines and a box of ammo has been buried in a flower bed at a Washington, D.C., hotel for nearly fifteen years. The owner carries the weapon for protection whenever he does business in the capital city.



Walther PPK double-bagged for burial.

maintenance or repair would be much greater.

Recently, airline search procedures have become more sophisticated. Today, Wilson might not get away with carrying a pistol through in checked baggage. In all probability, he would have to smuggle a pistol in using a private automobile or public ground transportation, such as a bus or train. Since he launched his personal protection program, virtually every criminal in Washington, D.C.—probably some panhandlers included—has upgraded his weapons. Wilson believes that anyone without a sidearm in that city is at a real disadvantage.

Caching a pistol in crime-plagued Washington, D.C., is an excellent example of a modern-day self-defense strategy. In the burgeoning struggle for survival, this is one practical application for caching that may be useful to a number of citizens. But it is only one of several.

Investment

Back in the mid-'30s, when the Federal Firearms Act was enacted, a close friend who happened to be the sheriff in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, bought three 1928 Navy-model Thompson submachine guns for private use. Because of the new law, popular opinion held that these sort of guns were just about worthless. He purchased them for thirty dollars apiece. He coated the guns with grease inside and out, put them in a rough box built of heavy cyprus planks, and buried them in the ground for long-term storage.

Because of the limited technology of that era, he found he had to dig the Thompsons up from time to time to be sure they remained in good shape. They kept well over the years, due largely to the ideal location in which he chose to place the cache. Tippecanoe County is characterized by well-drained, sandy soil. By avoiding swamps and bog holes, he was able to keep the

weapons absolutely rust-free until the time came to sell them.

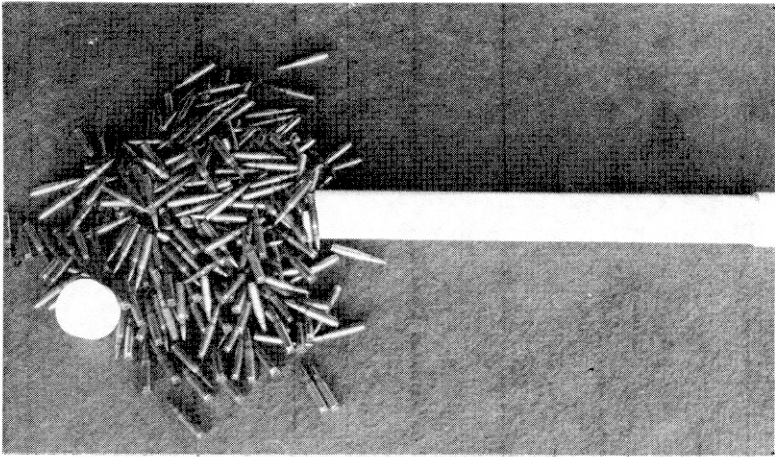
My friend the sheriff retired in 1958, and his wife contracted cancer in early 1964. He dug the weapons up for the last time and took them to town to sell. As it worked out, they were an excellent investment for the man, having appreciated many times over. He secured top dollar for weapons that were virtually unavailable from any other source.

In this instance, weapons caching went beyond being a self-preservation plan and became a valid investment strategy. Should semiautomatic weapons—including so-called assault rifles—suddenly be banned, those who have them and are willing and able to put them in the ground for a few years will later find their investment has doubled or tripled. Already we have seen common AK-47s and AR-15s go from a little over four hundred dollars to a thousand dollars or more.

Ammo is an excellent item to consider when look-



Burying your semiautos now, before they are banned, goes beyond self-defense or self-preservation. It is a valid financial investment strategy.



Cache ammunition in smaller tubes alongside your weapons. Since ammo rarely, if ever, decreases in value, it is a good investment. And it may not always be as freely available as it is today.

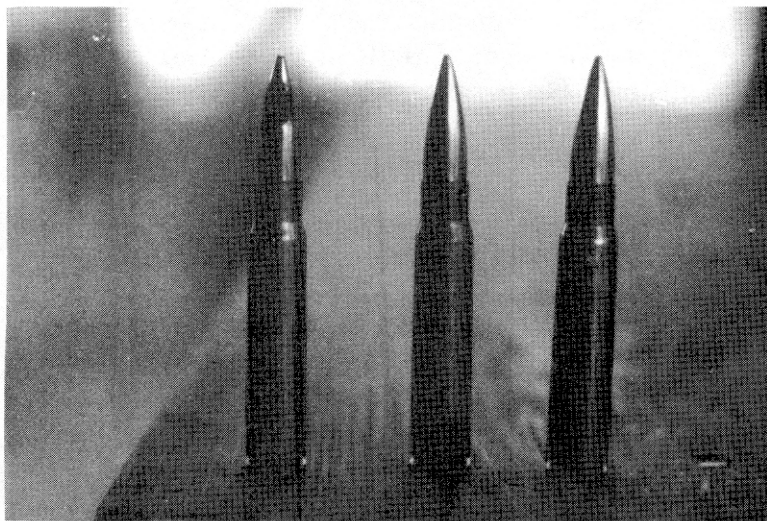
ing at investment caching. It keeps as well or better in a cache than weapons, and because it is consumed rapidly under some circumstances, it is not nearly as easily replaced as one might initially suppose. Gun nuts who are accustomed to popping down to the local gun shop for a fresh supply of powder, bullets, or loaded rounds should give this concept some serious thought.

Early in the surplus military weapons era I purchased two million rounds of ammo on behalf of a firearms shop for which I worked. The lot included 9mm Parabellum, 8mm Japanese pistol, 7.62mm NATO, 8mm Lebel, 8mm Mauser, 6.5 x 55 Swedish Mauser, and some 6.5 x 54R Dutch ammo. We paid two cents per round on the average, and I was certain we would never get our forty thousand dollars back out of the deal, much less turn a profit. However, when surplus weapons started to sell in large numbers, we priced most of the calibers at ten dollars per hundred rounds for the first six months, then twelve dollars and fifteen dollars until it was all sold.

Some calibers sold better than others, but we made excellent money on the entire lot. It was only one of many lots of ammo we purchased for resale. Through the years we always scraped together enough cash to purchase any odd or surplus ammo available. At one time, we had at least \$100,000 tied up in .25-, .32-, and .41-caliber rimfire ammo as well as less exotic numbers such as .303 Savage, 6mm Lee Navy, .25-20 single shot, .30 Remington, .33 Winchester, and many others.

Right now, while cheap surplus ammo is still available, I might suggest that it would be a "no-brainer" to buy up a large supply of the more commonly used calibers and put it underground until the time when it becomes scarce. Ammo virtually never goes down in price.

In my personal cache, I have some surplus 8mm Mauser ammo, manufactured in Turkey in 1914, which was originally part of a two-million-round order placed in 1962. It came to us in sealed cans. Other than the



These 8mm Mauser rounds, made in 1914, have been cached since 1964. Despite the corrosion seen on the left round, only one in fifty fails to fire.

small amount I blasted away for fun, I left the ammo in the sealed containers and resealed it in cache tubes. Now, more than seventy-five years after its manufacture, the ammo still fires reasonably well. About one round in fifty will not fire, but since it is mostly blasting ammo manufactured under questionable circumstances, I don't consider this to be an insurmountable problem.

Personal Protection

Weapons can be cached for isolated circumstances when personal safety is threatened and a sure method of self-defense is needed to provide peace of mind, and they can also be cached for investment purposes. But for most people, weapons caching provides safe, long-term storage of their best means of personal protection.

As laws change and rules are promulgated by state and national legislators, the need for caching may become especially pressing. Citizens of California and New Jersey who wish to remain at least on an equity base with criminals, or who have expensive guns they do not wish to throw onto an uncertain market, are already victims of a force that may be a harbinger of things to come throughout this nation.

In other places, gun nuts with large collections of guns and ammo may be victims of this force as well. A law-abiding gun owner may thwart the robbery of his home, only to be harassed unmercifully by the media. Who wants to read about himself in the paper—**“Local man found with dozens of guns, thousands of rounds of ammo.”** No matter that there were only nine guns and that three were single-shot 410s that you bought for your kids and that “thousands of rounds” is only four or five cartons of 22s all purchased at a dollar per box. The media will fry gun owners if they get any chance at all. Just the fact that a gun nut has several weapons and

more than a handful of ammo is more than enough cause for the media to come down very hard on him. Though our hobby constitutes no threat to anyone except criminals, every gun owner is held in contempt and suspicion.

Gun owners who foresee themselves in these types of uncomfortable circumstances may wish to consider caching all of the weapons they do not plan to use on a frequent basis. Those who do it now, under relatively easy, unpressured circumstances, may be the real winners in the long run. They will have enough time to think through their caching program adequately so that they can do it right.

Most really clever, innovative cachers require time to develop their programs. Especially for city dwellers with few burying options, caching done under duress is never as good as long-term plans that may involve some sophisticated masonry or carpenter work involving rerouting water pipes and so on.

Many inner-city gun owners fear that possessing weapons will, ironically, single them out as targets for common criminals (as opposed to official criminals), who either want weapons for their own use or know where they can sell all the quality weapons and ammo they can steal to people with all the money to buy them. Preventing your weapons from being stolen is another reason for caching, and it is a worthy one.

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You can build clever hides that allow you to look at your weapons from time to time. You may still wish to tape a box of ammo to the bottom of a dresser drawer or the lid of the toilet tank, but putting the bulk of your guns in a good cache now, when the time is available to do it right—before the thieves break in and while personal protection is still an option—may be the smartest

decision you, as a prudent gun owner, can make. If nothing else, your cache can be viewed as an investment that will pay great dividends in one way or another.