CHAPTER SIX

Caching vs. Hiding

Most regular practitioners of the art of caching eventually find that their day-to-day activities are focused on hiding their weapons as opposed to caching. In a tough, military-type context, where the user must keep at least some of his tools reasonably handy, this is extremely common. This is precisely the trend that both the French Resistance and the Vietcong experienced. Hiding was, for these people, the art of keeping a few weapons and a relatively small number of rounds of ammunition close at hand for immediate use, whereas caching was done on a more regional basis and usually involved a larger number of weapons and explosives.

Caching is semipermanent. Hiding is a temporary measure undertaken mostly for the immediate personal convenience of the end user. Gun owners in New York and Chicago would most likely engage in hiding activities, while those in California and New Jersey would most likely cache. Of course, the intensity with which the authorities might seek out gun owners also enters

the equation. Caching is generally much safer and less likely to lead to seizure.

Most gun nuts have hidden a weapon or two around their homes. Strategic caching, however, is a new concept to most people. Most people have problems differentiating between the two. There is a difference, however, and you must be able to separate the two functions in your own mind. You now have a decision to make, but the tools are at hand if you decide to cache.

Some modern caching techniques have crossover applications for hiders, and there are innovative new hiding methods that may be of interest to gun owners who do not feel they must cache at this time. Weapon owners must decide for themselves to what extent they are threatened and plan accordingly.

In several recent situations, it was obvious that federal marshals searching the homes of suspects deliberately attempted to tear the dwelling up as much as possible in order to coerce the property owner into giving in to their threats. In these circumstances, destruction is often not limited to what can be done with crow bar and hammer. A national news magazine recently carried a story regarding federal marshals who, in Nazi-like fashion, rented a large backhoe to assist them with the chore of tearing off a chunk of some poor citizen's home. Perhaps our marshals took their training from GIs returning from Vietnam, where entire villages were often burned in a search for weapons.

Assuming you are willing to suffer silently through a destructive search and/or maintain a low profile so that the authorities are unsure when they search, there are several modern hiding concepts that have promise. They are not foolproof, but they are helpful.

Most home hiding techniques are costly and difficult to implement. Probably the simplest is to take your heating system apart and hide a weapon way up in the

ducts. This will foil metal detectors, and the piece will keep nicely in the controlled atmosphere.

Be extremely cautious when implementing this or any other technique within a house or apartment. Repaint any nails and screws that are damaged, and keep any natural metal screws in nice, bright condition. Customs inspectors who search vessels for illegal drugs look first for screws that have been burred or that have paint that has been scarred.

Another excellent location is under the bathroom vanity between the riser or the sink cabinet and the floor. Again, the location is a good one because the pipes and faucets provide a sufficient mass of metal to confuse most metal detectors.

Most vanities are screwed into the wall at the rear of the cabinet. Open the doors and look at the rear one-by-twos to see if there are screw heads showing. Some cabinets will be screwed to the floor. Loosen the cabinet and fasten the weapon up under the vanity so that if it is moved, the weapon moves with it. Do not lay the weapon on the floor.

Placing a bare, unprotected weapon in this damp environment is not particularly wise. There is, however, a technique the modern hider can use to mitigate the situation. It is a vacuum-packed variation of the cache tube technology, similar to vacuum-packing meats and vegetables, and it is extremely useful for home hiders. By blister-packing your weapons in this manner you can protect them completely from the elements as long as the packages are not handled roughly or mistreated. I am using this device to protect a CAR-15 stored in the bottom of a boat under the bilge water! After more than six months, the weapon remains in excellent condition. (The example is even more remarkable because I ran the boat in salt water.)

Few special materials are needed, and those that are, when you can find them, are relatively inexpen-

Pistol, plastic sleeve, extra magazine, and 140-weight oil ready to be assembled into a hiding package. You may be able to obtain the four-mil. plastic sleeve required for blister packing from a butcher shop.

sive. Start by purchasing ten feet of eight- or ten-inch wide, three- or four-mil. plastic sleeve. This material is not extremely common. Hiders must exercise a bit of flexibility and use whatever is available, provided it is in the ball park functionally.

Four-mil. plastic sleeves are much better than three-mil. ones because they are tougher. (Other plastic products usually will not work either. Zip-lock bags, for instance, will not seal to the extent necessary to make the system work. Also, at two mil., they are also a bit on the light side for weapons. Even the heaviest supermarket garbage bags are far too light and subject to tears and holes.) Be certain the sleeve is close to the size of

the weapon. Excess width creates sloppy results.

In the past, I have used clear plastic army-surplus gun cases of Korean War vintage. New, longer, rifle-sized plastic sleeves are available from butcher shops and even from stationery stores at times. Auto body and parts stores sometimes get axles or drive shafts in plastic sleeves that they will save for you. The required plastic sleeves are never easy to find, especially in the heavier four-mil. weight. Finding them is the toughest part of what is an extremely effective technique for hiding rifles and carbines. Motivated hiders simply must get on the phone and call around until they turn up a supply source.

Once you've located four-mil. plastic sleeves, final assembly into a hiding package is decidedly easy. Coat the weapon with heavy 140 weight gear oil (available at

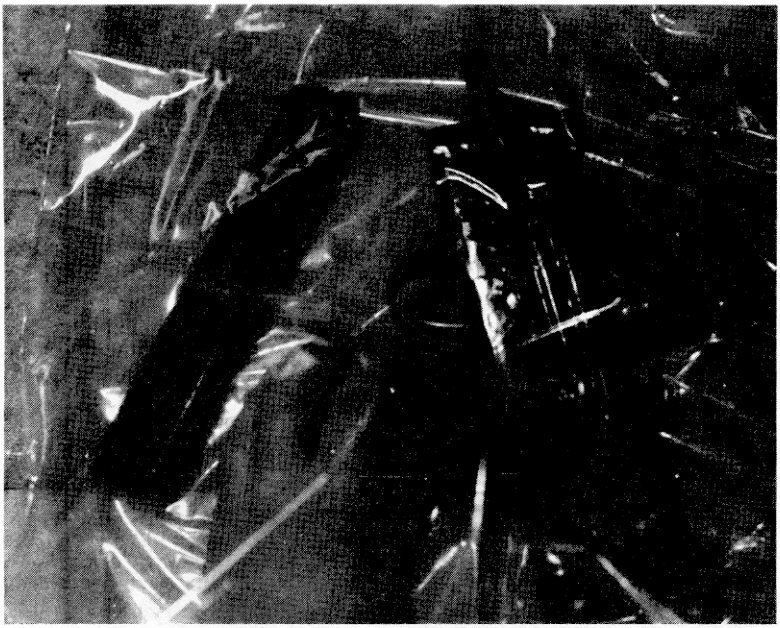
The weapon should be oiled with 140-weight gear oil before being placed in the plastic sleeve.

any automotive supply store), Conoco Cotton-Picker Spindle Grease (by special order), or regular lube grease. Insert the liberally greased weapon into the plastic sleeve. Weapons such as revolvers should be loaded, auto loaders stored with a loaded clip, and military carbines inserted with a loaded magazine or two. Placing ammunition with the weapon is important if it is likely that the weapon will be removed from the hide, superficially wiped off and put immediately into service.

Weapons that are properly oiled and placed in an air-evacuated sleeve are extremely impervious to the elements. They can be stored virtually any place where the plastic will not be torn or melted.

Cut the sleeve material, which is generally sold in ten- to fifteen-foot rolls, so it is about eighteen inches

To evacuate the air from the package, insert the weapon into the plastic sleeve and immerse in a large container of water. Be sure to keep the open "tail" of the sleeve above water.



Oiled pistol and magazine in blister pack after the air has been evacuated from the plastic sleeve. The package is now ready to be sealed.

longer than the weapon. (Pistols can be stored in a small pouch using the same procedure.) By leaving generous ends on the plastic sleeve, you make the completed package less subject to handling abuse that could destroy its effectiveness. This also makes the package easier to seal.

Fill a bathtub or other large container with water—a fifty-five-gallon barrel, large tank or, if one is handy, a pond or lake are ideal. Immerse the weapon and plastic sleeve on an angle so that as much water as possible covers it. (Obviously, you do not want to immerse the open end of the sleeve. Keep the extra "tail" above water.) Water pressure will force the air out of the sleeve and force the plastic to stick to the oil on the weapons. (Plastic heavier than four mil. will not shrink

down and conform to the weapon as well as material of the correct weight. It is possible to use heavier plastic if one can somehow heat the water used to evacuate the air out of the package.)

Roll the sleeve end over, seal the opening with a hot iron, and tie it with a piece of nylon cord. Check to be certain the sleeve is sealed and that no air or water can leak through by submerging it in a container of water.

Sealed-up weapons can be built into false ceilings, false end walls in closets, and body panels on vehicles, where they can be kept for years. With dry wall, it is reasonably easy to place the weapon inside a wall and then replaster and paint it to look precisely as the original. Had these evacuated packets been available, French Resistance members could have placed them inside wine barrels without damage to wine or weapon.

A close friend of mine, who was forced by an unreasonable employer to work out of an office in New York City, very carefully and meticulously shortened the drawer of a file cabinet, behind which he hid a pistol. Before moving, he spent scores of hours "remodeling" his file cabinet, including calling the factory for sheet metal parts that he had a local firm shorten. When reassembled and spray painted, the shortened drawer nicely hid his Beretta pistol with two extra magazines fastened in behind. He sent the locked file cabinet to the Big Apple via commercial movers. When he arrived in town, his personal protection was there waiting for him. As a practical matter, the scheme was extremely costly since it provided only for a pistol. Perhaps the file cabinet could have been modified to accept a CAR-15, but that would have been an even more monumental undertaking.

Professional searchers often look inside the cabinets of dishwashers and TVs, but this does not completely preclude them from being reasonably good spots in which to hide a weapon. At times, an HK-94 or a CAR-

15 can be placed inside the base of the cabinet where a professional might miss them. The trick in all cases is to be very careful with nails, screws, tacks, and staples so they do not look tampered with. (DEA search manuals instruct agents to turn over couches to determine whether they feel heavy and to see if the tacks and staples holding the upholstery appear to have been tampered with.)

Any of these hides will foil the casual searcher, but they will not fool the real pro. There are three additional hides available to many apartment dwellers that will work 99 percent of the time.

Assuming you can secure the help of a professional upholsterer and/or furniture dealer, it is feasible to install sleeved weapons in a waterbed. Waterbed mattresses can be professionally opened and then closed again so that the bed is usable. I have seen this hide used on two separate occasions. The owners were unclear and evasive about how they got the weapon inside the vinyl mattress. All they would say is that the factory did it for them.

If the dwelling has a basement, consider putting a regulation cache tube in the floor. The slickest scheme I have seen involved chipping through the cement to the earth below. Chipping out old concrete is a long and arduous task. It may even involve renting a small masonry hammer. This is a noisy, dirty tool that cannot be run in privacy if other tenants live in the building. If, by chance, the landlord or manager is alerted, you can claim you are putting in a radon trap.

Chipping out a round hole in the concrete by hand or with a masonry hammer involves cutting out wire or bar reinforcement placed in the concrete. This can be done with a bolt cutters or by using a cold chisel.

Remove enough concrete so that a complete cache tube will slide through the hole. Bring in a suitable post-hole auger and dig down five or six feet. With any

luck, the underlying material will be clay rather than gravel. If it is gravel, it will collapse in on itself, making it very difficult to drill a clean hole. Water and bentonite clay purchased from a nursery supply store can sometimes be used to stabilize a difficult gravel bed through which a cache tube hole must be bored. After digging, insert the tube and fill the hole.

Close the hole by placing a dummy cast-iron floor drain over the opening. Use a standard floor drain purchased from a plumber. In some cases, it may be necessary to cement this fitting in place. You can also use regular window putty colored with soot to hold it in place. After a few weeks, the putty sets up hard enough to withstand traffic on the basement floor. If possible, place a rug over the drain cache and fill it up with dust from the floor. Be sure that when you are done the entire assembly looks old and untampered with.

Adventurers who have used this technique report that they worked a week of evenings putting the hide in place. Depending on your circumstances, it may be worth the effort, as this hide will almost certainly never be found. Metal detectors will be foiled by the cast-iron drain assembly and the wire in the concrete.

There is one other device worth mentioning that is so sophisticated that it might not be uncovered by professional searchers. Modern structures are usually built on two-by-ten-foot floor joists. To the hider, this means that a space about nine inches deep, fifteen inches wide, and up to three or more feet long is available between the basement ceiling and the floor above it. However, hiding in between floor joists is a fairly common device that most authorities are aware of. While it has merit, it must be done very cleverly.

Move the refrigerator out from its space in the kitchen. Carefully and meticulously lift the linoleum from the spot on the floor where the refrigerator usually stands. Lifting linoleum can be quite easy or a real

bitch, depending on how well the original builders put it in and how old it is. Some older apartments will likely have two or more layers of linoleum. As a rule, the floor covering under the fridge is often in fairly good condition and can be lifted without undue trauma to it or the hider.

Once the plywood or particle board underlayment is exposed, find the exact location of the floor joists below. Various builders differ in the care with which they install floor joists. Each installation is different. Use a small nail, a ruler, or an electronic stud-locating device. Draw out a 16-inch rectangle on the floor, outlining the exact midpoint of the floor joists. This marking is critical and should be done with great precision.

Using a carbide-tipped blade on a skill saw, cut the subflooring out no deeper than the 5/8-inch plywood or 1/2-inch particle board. Doing this without cutting too deeply into the supporting joists or gouging holes in the floor takes a great deal of skill. Lift out the 16-by-18-inch (or whatever size is cut) block of subflooring. Below will be a perfect hollow spot in which to hide a weapon.

Slide the plastic weapons packet into the opening. Replace the subflooring block, puttying the cracks where the saw cut. When replaced, the piece of subflooring should rest nicely on the exposed part of the joists below. Roll back and carefully replace the linoleum. It may be wise to glue the linoleum back down lightly.

When the refrigerator is moved back over the hide, it creates an excellent psychological and physical barrier to searchers. The mass of the refrigerator along with the water pipes and electrical lines in the kitchen will tend to confuse metal detectors. Searchers might be reluctant to move a refrigerator and, if they do, they might still overlook the hide if it is constructed correctly.

These three situations are not foolproof, and they

probably are not long-term solutions to what may actually call for caching. They are, however, the best there is under less-than-perfect circumstances.

The Golden Rule on hiding is fearfully simple: well-trained, highly motivated officials who are reasonably certain you have a weapon hidden in your home will find it. It is possible to make their chore very difficult, and they will tear up your house or apartment in the process, but they will find a weapon that is hidden within the confines of your home. To assume otherwise is folly.

In the end, the best solution is to maintain a low profile. If the bad guys are not sure the weapon they seek is under your control, they will be reluctant to search as hard and as thoroughly as they otherwise might.