Introduction

W eapons caching has been an important strategy in at least two of the major wars fought in the past fifty years.

Initially, it may seem strange to view weapons caching as having a significant impact on World War II, but in the case of occupied France from 1940 to 1944, the willingness and ability of the French Resistance to take delivery of weapons, move them around the country, and then safely store them against the day of need contributed in part to the defeat of the Nazis. Although the Resistance efforts were considered by many to be relatively puny (they used only three thousand pounds of C-4 for their entire operation, less than one good-sized bomb from a B-24 Liberator), they were more effective at sabotaging the Nazi war effort by stopping the production and flow of munitions than the entire bomber command, and inadvertent civilian casualties from Resistance activities were very light.

The Resistance organized very quickly after the occupation of France in June 1940. Because the French,

like the English, had little history of private firearm ownership, there were few weapons on hand with which to commence action. (Historical records show that some farmers had shotguns, but virtually none owned pistols or rifles legally.) The first British agent into Paris radioed back that they had "but two revolvers and two rifles." This appraisal may not have been entirely accurate, but it was the one accepted by the English.

Initially, only the French Communists were organized enough to carry out a credible program of opposition to the Germans. (Some historians downplay their role, but it was the Communists against the Fascists, and the United States supported the Communists.)

Some thirty years later, the United States lost in Vietnam, in part because of the elaborate, careful, weapons caches set up in patient, thorough, oriental fashion by the Vietnamese. Like the Resistance in World War II, the able, careful Vietcong made great use of weapons caches to defeat an opponent that thought itself smarter, better organized, and more technologically advanced.

Correlations between the Vietcong, who were Stalinist Communists, and members of the French Resistance, who were more Trotsky-like, are perhaps coincidental; at the very least the link is ironic. Nevertheless, like the French before them, burying weapons was, for the Vietnamese, a key tactical strategy. Each time they suffered reversal, their weapons went safely underground, beneath flooded rice paddies, or into the swamps.

Weapons caching technologies have changed dramatically since World War II. Methods of resealing containers and evacuating moisture have advanced to the point that technological problems are no longer a consideration. Caching difficulties with which the French Resistance labored mightily can be handled today without much thought as to what we would do without inexpensive plastic pipe, fittings, moisture-absorbing chemicals, and modern greases.

The Resistance had to work with heavy, clumsy, shiny aluminum tubing that cracked, corroded, leaked, and bent out of shape, creating almost insurmountable opening and reclosing problems. Modern plastic pipe and fittings found in plumbing supply shops alleviate these problems to a large extent. Like its aluminum predecessor, most plastic pipe is so tough it can be dropped out of a plane.

Because technologies related to locating a cache have also made quantum leaps, the person whose strategy includes weapons caching must now spend more time and energy deciding where to place a cache. This is in contrast to World War II, when the Resistance had to give as much thought to how the cache would be built as to where it would be placed.

Based upon the great emphasis some law enforcement people place on thoroughly searching a suspect's home, yard, and grounds with sensitive electronic devices, official searchers and seekers appear to have identified weapons caching as a particularly threatening activity. These officials seem to have learned the lessons of history better than average citizens suspect.

Americans in Vietnam knew the Vietcong were getting weapons from irregular caches, and they learned that they needed to locate these caches whenever possible. Today many Americans realize the United States is in a race against firearms confiscation in which the lessons of the past will play a significant role. This book is dedicated to those who wish to look to the future with both mistrust and a will to prevail.