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BUG-OUT OR HUNKER DOWN?

by *Samuel Adams*

Many prepared citizens include among their disaster preparations relocation plans. There are hidden threats which must be analyzed before it can be determined whether these plans are feasible or one would be better advised to stay put or relocate in advance of a crisis. A threat analysis shows three concerns which must be addressed.

GETTING AWAY FROM YOUR PRESENT LOCATION

Someone living in a large metropolitan area may plan to relocate with rural friends or relatives or to a hunting camp. This may be desirable because of the rioting after the Rodney King verdict in Los Angeles and its clone riots across the nation, the evisceration of our national defense or fears of a police state becoming a reality. Getting out of a city in a riot may be dangerous if not impossible. Remember the trucker who was pulled from his cab, beaten, stomped and shot during the LA riot while a news helicopter filmed the entire atrocity? In September 1995, a lost motorist and his entire family entered a free fire zone when their vehicle was riddled as it turned down a dead end street in LA gang territory. His three-year old daughter was killed. This was NOT part of a riot, just another day in L.A.

If you live in a metropolis, you still should have an evacuation plan. More importantly, you should be implementing a plan to move out permanently before a crisis can occur. Better to migrate than evacuate. I lived in a large eastern city for the first 28 years of my life and know how a rock concert, sporting event or 3 inches of snow can paralyze a section or an entire city's traffic. An exodus due to the breakdown of civilization or a government ordered evacuation prior to nuclear attack or after a nuclear accident would create gridlock on a massive scale. Remember the effect the latest California earthquake had on traffic for months? The same would happen in heavily developed suburbs with interstate, state and local roads jammed with suburbanites AND urban refugees.

SAFETY ENROUTE TO YOUR DESTINATION

Disasters, both natural and manmade, bring out the best and worst in people. The idea of packing up a sport-utility vehicle, RV or pickup truck and escaping chaos and carnage for the safety of the hills seems appealing. Anyone seriously planning to do so has chosen several alternate routes and tested them. Usually back roads are preferred over heavily traveled interstate and state routes because of (hopefully) less traffic.

Murphy's Law rules in war and disasters. A detour due to bridge repairs or an accident could send you miles off course in unfamiliar territory. Local law enforcement could set up roadblocks in response to the very crisis situation you are attempting to escape, preventing outsiders from entering their jurisdiction. That may force you back onto the interstate or state highways already teeming with traffic in an effort to reach an alternate route.

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Society's predators also thrive during disasters. Did you really think they were going to stay back in the city? They have the luxury of picking their prey as they leave. What would be more appealing to a carload of heavily armed dirtbags than *your* well-prepared vehicle just waiting to be carjacked? No one is going to intervene if they attack you on a main road and there won't be any witnesses on a back road. It would be just like *The Road Warrior*, free transportation and supplies, target practice (father and son) and "recreation" (mother and teenage daughter). No Mad Max or (as usual) police in sight.

WHAT YOU MAY FIND AT YOUR DESTINATION

Unless your retreat isn't terribly distant or your schedule permits frequent weekend "vacations" to check on its condition, you probably will not travel there more than a few times a year. I live in a rural area less than half an hour from cabins vacationers lease from the state park on a year-round basis. There are many incidents of these cabins being vandalized and burglarized, firearms being a favorite item to steal.

Another problem is that you have no control over remote property when you are not there. In a large-scale disaster and subsequent population relocation, neighbors may determine their refugee relatives rate more consideration than you, and you may find your well-stocked retreat occupied upon arrival. A touchy social situation at best! Of course, society's predators could also arrive there before you, taking full advantage of your shelter, supplies and weapons.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Relocating from the city to a live-in retreat may not be practical for many because of employment. Many professions (computer programmer, nurse, carpenter, etc.) are in demand in smaller cities adjacent to rural areas. Obtain their Sunday newspapers to determine the employment outlook. While there will be a pay cut, the cost of living is lower in rural areas than in large cities. Housing costs much less than in trendy suburbs of large cities. My property taxes for a home on 3 acres are what they were on a row house in my native city. Older homes a bargain compared to new homes anywhere, just be certain to have the well, septic system and heating systems checked before you buy. The cost of staying alive is also lower as are crime rates, at least for now.

Select several prospective locations (both employment and home) and obtain information about the area from the local chamber of commerce or visitors bureau. Visit each location for a weekend. Learn what you can about their local government, economy, taxes and school system. When you decide upon a preferred location spend a couple of days there during the week to learn more about neighboring towns, roads, utility rates, schools and zoning ordinances. Some townships have very restrictive zoning ordinances, which govern location and type of buildings on a property. Others have few or no zoning ordinances at all. If you are planning to build, this may seem beneficial. Without zoning ordinances, a developer could build tract housing or an apartment complex on what was a cornfield or orchard across from or next to your home! I have seen it happen.

If you make the move, blend into the area. If you are going to complain about the lack of cable TV, police force or public transit, you should not have left the city. You will draw unwanted attention to yourself and not endear yourself to lifelong residents.

For those who decide to bug out, timing is essential. It is difficult to know if and when to leave. If one anticipated a guilty verdict in the O.J. Simpson trial and riots across the nation, it would

have been prudent to take the family up to the retreat for a weekend vacation and call everyone in sick on Monday when the verdict was to be announced. Good planning, but no riots. However, most crises do not operate according to a pre-announced schedule.

Plan accordingly to mitigate the dangers I listed. When it is your family, there are no acceptable casualties! Remember there is only a limited amount you can take with you, whether it is your family alone or a group of vehicles. Have everything you plan to take packed and ready to load at all times. Should your retreat be occupied, looted or torched when you arrive, you will become refugees. In all the world's conflicts, refugees have always been the most pitiful victims, at the mercy of corrupt governments and brutal thugs.