Esquire

How Would the U.S. Survive a Nuclear War?

Don't worry. Our people are working on the problem right now

Following a nuclear attack on the United States, the U.S. Postal Service plans to distribute Emergency Change of Address Cards. "This postage-free card," the Postal Service's emergency-planning manual explains, "would be used by displaced survivors of an attack to notify the Postal Service of their emergency mailing addresses." The manual gives several examples of completed cards. One sample, for a (Mr.) William Thomas Butler, gives a "pre-emergency" address of Upton Street in Washington, D.C., and says that he can now be reached at Box 21, Leesburg, Virginia. But the sample card filled out for (Miss) Mabel Jane Butler tells a sadder story. Her preemergency address, like Butler's, was on Upton Street in Washington; her present address, however, reads: "Deceased, Mortuary #10, Falls Church, Virginia 22040."

It is possible that the pain of a Mabel Jane Butler in her last hours, or of any victim of a nuclear attack, will be eased by a stockpile of opium reserved by the government for use on just such an occasion. The National Defense Stockpile of Strategic and Critical Materials includes sixty-one items, ranging from aluminum to opium to zinc. The stockpile goal for each item is the amount that would be needed by the United States

BY Ed Zuckerman

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during a three-year conventional war or the amount that would be needed during a nuclear war, whichever quantity is greater. "Only in the case of opium did the nuclear-war goal [75,000 pounds] exceed the conventional-war goal [70,000 pounds]," the director of the Federal Preparedness Agency told a congressional committee in 1976. In 1980, the opium requirement was refigured and the goal was raised to 130,000 pounds; 71,000 pounds are currently on hand.

Of course, the warehouses in which the drug is stored may not withstand a nuclear attack, but surviving federal officials will be able to check that situation out quickly. Over the past two decades, the new Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its predecessors have compiled computerized data on almost two million American factories, military installations, population centers, farms, dams, caves, banks, television stations, and other facilities "deemed important enough to consider in evaluating the effects of a nuclear attack on the U.S." Every facility is listed in the computer system by its latitude and longitude or, failing that, by its Zip Code, and is assigned a "vulnerability factor," based on its type of construction. During a nuclear attack, information on incoming weapons will be fed into FEMA computers, housed deep underground in Maryland and Virginia. They will then stand ready to receive questions via a streamlined computer program called React, which has been designed, according to the *React User's Guide*, "to meet the need for quick response to queries from top level decision makers concerning the probable trans-attack status of high interest resources."

In other words, while the bombs are still falling, a federal health official with access to a computer terminal and a working telephone line will be able to type out the question: HOW MANY STRATEGIC AND CRITICAL STOCKPILE STORAGE FACILITIES IN REGION 1 ARE UNDAMAGED WITH NO FIRE? And receive an answer. Such an official will also be able to inquire about hospitals and drug manufacturers. If he can bear to look, he can also call up the casualty estimates for his home town.

A Positive Attitude

Like most people, I have never worried much about how I will get my mail following a nuclear attack. I've always assumed that under those circumstances I won't be needing my cable TV bills—or anything else.

This negative attitude may have come from reading, at an impressionable age, Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach*, which chronicles the last days of the last people on earth as a deadly radioactive cloud from a nuclear blast slowly spreads around the world. ("I won't take it.... It's so bloody unfair," protests Shute's plucky Australian heroine before dying.) Or maybe it came from taking to heart the lyrics of satirist Tom Lehrer:

We will all go together when we go,
All suffused with an incandescent glow.
No one will have the endurance
To collect on his insurance.
Lloyd's of London will be loaded when we go.

℗ 1953 Tom Lehrer

Wherever it came from, it is an attitude with which William Baird is all too familiar; he has encountered it often, and it has certainly done nothing to make his work any easier. Baird, a gray-haired retired naval officer, was FEMA's assistant associate director for national security plans and preparedness when I interviewed him last summer, and part of his job was to prepare America for life after a nuclear war. Obviously, if people don't believe there is going to *be* life in America after a nuclear war, they will be disinclined to put much effort into preparing for it. "This is a damned hard program to manage," Baird said. "People don't want to give time to it. The average guy has enough on his calendar."

Just a few weeks before I met with Baird, a group called International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War had gathered in Washington and held a press conference to announce that, because of the number of deaths that would result from a nuclear war (a total of 200 million in the U.S. and the USSR, the group estimates) and the injuries, destruction, and "profound psychological shock" that would accompany them, "the social fabric upon which human existence depends would be irreparably damaged."

"There *is* a group that feels that way," Baird nodded. "I feel they're misinformed and they're not taking into account what is statistically indicated to be a substantial number of people who would survive."

In fact, FEMA's and International Physicians's estimates of the number of survivors are surprisingly close. (A recent FEMA study estimates that if a large-scale nuclear attack were to come in the near future, 93 million Americans—32 million of whom would be injured—would survive, and that 174 million would survive if a precautionary evacuation of target areas took place ahead of time.) But, whereas International Physicians and like-minded groups argue that the cup is half-empty, FEMA asserts that it is half-full. "Everyone agrees that a nuclear war could be an unparalleled disaster," says a recent FEMA publication. "But it need not be an *unmitigated* disaster."

The U.S. government has always rejected the pessimistic approach to life in post–nuclear war America. The *National Plan for Emergency Preparedness*, issued in 1964 and still in effect, acknowledges that a nuclear attack on the United States "would create unprecedented and exceed-

ingly difficult problems" but maintains that the nation "must be able not only to withstand an initial nuclear assault and to bring hostilities to a favorable conclusion but also to restore its social, political and economic systems." It predicts that this would take several years.

More than thirty federal departments and agencies have been assigned specific responsibilities for restoring those systems and are charged with devising their "postattack" plans during what is widely referred to in the government's emergency-planning literature as the "preattack" period—that is, now.

Much of this planning proceeds from Executive Order 11490, which was issued by President Richard Nixon in 1969 and has since been periodically updated. Executive Order 11490 commands the Department of Justice, for example, to make plans for establishing "the location, restraint, or custody of alien enemies" following a nuclear attack. The Securities and Exchange Commission is instructed to develop plans "to reestablish and maintain a stable and orderly market for securities when the situation permits under emergency conditions."

Life After the Bomb

Investigation reveals that some federal agencies are apparently dragging their heels on fulfilling their post–nuclear attack responsibilities. Repeated calls to the SEC, for example, yielded no hard information as to how the stock market would function after a nuclear war. And some agencies' plans have long been out-of-date. Executive Order 11490 commands the Public Health Service to plan for "sanitary aspects of disposal of the dead," but the PHS, when queried, could produce nothing more recent than a 1956 civil-defense pamphlet with the twenty-five-year-old (but probably still applicable) advice: "If conditions permit, mechanically dug continuous trenches offer the best solution to the burial problem. If the machines available are capable only of digging narrow trenches, bodies can be placed head to foot instead of side by side."

A survey of other key agencies, however, finds several that are as well prepared as is the Postal Service. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has recently revised its manuals on the postattack housing problem. They now include procedures for requisitioning private homes "whose owners have disappeared." One manual also discusses how to establish, for all postattack emergency housing, firm rent guidelines (rents "will conform to the rental schedules... for comparable accommodations"), tenant priorities (refugees get preference), and grounds for eviction (nonpayment of rent shall be considered one "unless in the judgment of the Housing Manager or Managing Agent the failure to pay is due to causes beyond the control of the occupant"). In addition, the manual specifies that the rental of private housing taken over after owners have vanished shall be on a month-by-month basis only and that "renters of such housing will be required to vacate within 30 days if the legal owner appears and requires the property."

The Department of Agriculture has made equally detailed plans for food rationing after a nuclear attack. Every surviving American will receive a weekly allotment of six eggs, four pounds of cereals, two pounds of frozen fruits and vegetables, one-half pound of fats and oils, two pounds of potatoes, one-half pound of sweets, and three pounds of meat. "That's about two thousand to twenty-five hundred calories per person per day," said Harold Gay, a Department of Agriculture emergency planner, "about two thirds of normal caloric input right now, if you could have something from every grouping."

But could you actually have something from every grouping, or *any* grouping, for that matter?

"Just because you have fallout on a crop doesn't mean it's not safe to eat," Gay pointed out. "Fallout is dust. It can be removed by normal washing, peeling, and so on. If it's mixed in with the actual food product, then you would store it. Radioactivity decays. Milk, for example, is very susceptible to radioactivity. You can't hold the milk until the radioactivity decays, but you can process it into cheese and store the cheese."

But would society still be functioning when that radioactive cheese cooled off?

> The President, upon warning of attack, would board a specially shielded, $250 million version of the 747, which sits on permanent alert.

FEMA says there's no reason it couldn't be. No fewer than 369 "postattack recovery studies" are available in FEMA's research library, states a 370th, and "years of research have failed to reveal any single factor that would preclude recovery from nuclear attack." As for individuals, the study continues, those who survive the blast, heat, and short-term radioactivity will face no greater risk of dying from cancer than does, for example, someone who has smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for two years. As for fears about long-term, catastrophic effects on the nation's ecology, the study concludes, "No nuclear attack which is at all probable could induce gross changes in the balance of nature that approach in type or degree the ones that human civilization has already inflicted on the environment," such as "cutting most of the orignal forests, tilling the prairies, irrigating the deserts... and even preventing forest fires."

A number of scientists (not to mention Smokey the Bear) would contest that view, and doomsayers have conditioned the public to expect much worse. But no serious critic of nuclear war, no matter how pessimistic, has denied that millions of people would survive one; which allows FEMA's William Baird to make his essential point.

"The survivors will try to continue to survive," Baird said, leaning forward on his couch. "And what happens to them? Do they break up into tribes, or do they try to operate as a nation? Someone has to direct things for the common good. Otherwise, it will be dog-eat-dog, which we don't want to see. There's got to be law and order, and everything else."

Chain of Command

The chief someone in charge of directing things for the common good will be, of course, the President; so elaborate plans have been formulated to make sure there *is* a President after a nuclear attack—and only *one* President, if the original President isn't around anymore. "One of the things we discovered is that there was no authentication system," said General Louis Giuffrida, the Reagan appointee as director of FEMA, in a recent speech to a civil-defense organization. "So that if [someone] got on the horn and said, 'I'm the successor,' and somebody said, 'Prove it,' [no one could]. So we're working on that. FEMA will be the authenticating mechanism to say, 'Yeah, this guy's for real. The President's gone, and we don't know where the Vice-President is... and this is the man.'"

To forestall any confusion, FEMA has already designed, and the White House administers, a Central Locator System for

keeping tabs on the whereabouts of the President and all sixteen of his constitutionally designated successors. Upon warning of a nuclear attack on Washington, Air Force helicopters would swoop down and ferry the successors to safety. The President himself would board the National Emergency Airborne Command Post, a windowless, specially shielded, $250 million version of the 747, which sits on permanent alert at Andrews Air Force Base.

Circling thousands of feet above the fallout, the President will have at his fingertips a copy of the classified *Federal Emergency Plan D*, which outlines federal recovery plans and contains a set of "Presidential Emergency Action Documents" authorizing the creation of emergency agencies and powers for mobilization and reconstruction in the event of nuclear war. A similar set of documents, designed for legislative action, are included in a compilation known as the "Other Than D Documents." These documents would be sent to Congress—if Congress still existed—for approval. If Congress had disappeared, the President could simply issue the Plan D documents as proclamations. "You won't have a big staff there to say, 'Go prepare me a legal document with all the necessary details,'" William Baird explained, "so these have been done ahead of time."

Among the Plan D documents is a proclamation of war. "Only Congress can *declare* war," explained Baird. "The President can issue a proclamation that a state of war exists. Legally, a lot of things [including emergency powers] depend on that."

So the proclamation has already been drafted, with a few blanks to be filled in later. Like the date. And the name of the enemy.

While the President is in his airborne command post attending to legal details, many other situations will have to be monitored. To that end, provisions have been made for the survival of a cadre of bureaucrats from some three dozen "Category A" federal agencies, ranging from the CIA to the TVA, which are deemed to require the "capability for uninterrupted emergency operations" during "the immediate preattack, transattack and immediate postattack periods." This distinguishes them from Category B agencies, which have roles to play in "postattack reconstitution as soon as conditions permit," and the relatively expendable Category C agencies, which "are to defer reconstitution until directed by appropriate authority."

In preparation for postattack reconstitution, Category A agencies are required to safeguard essential records now. (Department of Labor guidelines suggest that such records "be wrapped in protective paper," as "experience has revealed that unprotected records not wrapped and sealed are often damaged by dust and moisture.") Category A agencies are also responsible for establishing emergency succession lists for the replacement of key officials who die in the attack. ("It is desirable to designate several executives who are frequent travelers and thus increase the likelihood that all successors will not be concentrated in the Washington capitol area at any given time," advises Federal Preparedness Circular FPC-14.)

Most crucial, each Category A agency has established three emergency teams. Team A would administer from the agency's regular headquarters during the period of increased international tension that might precede a nuclear attack. Team B would report to Mount Weather, a massive underground complex that is the centerpiece of the entire "Continuity of Government" program, and would take over for Team A if Team A ceased to exist. Team C would report to its agency's secret relocation site somewhere in the Federal Relocation Arc, a network of emergency operating centers just a few hours' drive from Washington, and provide backup for teams A and B.

A Federal Reserve System book warns banks to safeguard their records and to instruct employees on nuclear-war banking methods.

To aid in the case of traffic jams or other tie-ups immediately preceding or following a nuclear attack, every emergency-team member has already been issued a Federal Employee Emergency Identification Card, which carries both the bearer's photo and blood type and the message: THE PERSON DESCRIBED ON THIS CARD HAS ESSENTIAL EMERGENCY DUTIES WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. REQUEST FULL ASSISTANCE AND UNRESTRICTED MOVEMENT BE AFFORDED THE PERSON TO WHOM THIS CARD IS ISSUED.

But certain factors may keep team members from reaching their assigned places. Most Category A agencies have made no plans for their team members' families, and a 1978 survey of 534 emergency-team members in six departments found that although more than 80 percent said they probably would report to their emergency duty stations, 76 percent said that improving provisions for their families would increase the likelihood of their showing up. "There's a fifty-fifty chance I'd go," one high-ranking official assigned to Mount Weather told me recently. "And if I do go, I'll probably take my family with me. What are the guards going to do? I don't think they'd capture me and take me inside without my family. They could turn us all away, but that misses the whole point of the thing."

Other questions have arisen about Mount Weather. Eighty miles west of Washington, near the town of Paris, Virginia, the complex contains offices, dormitories, computers, briefing papers, a reservoir, and Public Health Service Health Unit No. 1, a fully staffed hospital where any official assigned to Mount Weather can get a free checkup at any time. But Mount Weather was built during the 1950s, and the Russians know where it is. Enemy forces, equipped with modern nuclear weapons, "can dig out anything they want now," points out John J. Policastro, a retired Army officer who directs FEMA's Continuity of Government division.

"Do you scrap something like Mount Weather?" he pondered during a recent interview. "Its capital costs are amortized, and it *might* survive an attack. The operating costs of a place like that are pretty cheap.... Maybe at some point, when you have sufficient alternatives, you close it."

Alternatives to Mount Weather are being investigated right now. In 1980, a secret Continuity of Government study was undertaken at the request of the National Security Council; its results were incorporated in Presidential Directive 58, issued by President Carter in August 1980 in tandem with Presidential Directive 59, which made explicit a shift in American strategic doctrine toward the idea of "limited" nuclear warfare.

PD-58 is classified, but it apparently calls for a new, less centralized Continuity of Government program, relying instead on federal offices and employees already outside Washington. It is based on the "Federal Regional Reconstitution Area" planning concept, under which federal regional offices have designated certain small towns and cities with no obvious military or industrial targets as potential

government centers in postattack America.

"If you can disperse your people so that if Russia wanted to target them it would soak up a large number of weapons," said one FEMA planner, "they'd have to judge, 'Is it worth expending so many weapons?' If you build that kind of system, what have you done? You've assured the survival of Washington."

A Visit to the Mine

The survival of Hutchinson, Kansas, on the other hand, seems to be much less in doubt. And so I found myself on the outskirts of the place one day in early spring talking to the man who operates the elevator into the Carey Salt Mine. "Here," he said, "this is for use in case of fire only." He handed me and a couple of other visitors small but heavy gray boxes that would help us breathe—no one explained how—if flames sucked up all the air underground. We were already wearing our green hard hats and gray safety glasses as we waited to go down into the mine, a worked-out portion of which is leased to a warehouse company called Underground Vaults & Storage, which, in turn, leases two underground rooms to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Like their Washington headquarters, all regional offices of Category A agencies are required to establish emergency operating teams; following a nuclear war, the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City's team will conduct the bank's affairs from the bottom of the Carey Salt Mine.

The other visitors and I had to wait until the miners' break to go down into the mine; during working hours the passenger elevator doubles as a skip, carrying four tons of salt to the surface on every trip. We rode down—650 feet down—in silence and absolute darkness. At the bottom, which was lighted, we walked along the little railway that carries salt to the elevator until we reached a solid salt wall, painted blue, that marks the entrance to Underground Vaults & Storage. The lobby is decorated with a display case full of baseball trophies and golf balls stamped with corporate logos. The ceiling, like that of the mine, is a low six feet. "We keep it that way on purpose," said a smiling UVS official as he ushered us into the warehouse offices, where the ceilings are higher ("to create an illusion of space in here for people who have claustrophobia").

And the UVS offices, with their bright shag rugs, dropped ceilings, and artificial plants, do look almost normal. But the post–nuclear attack headquarters of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City is rather less cheerful. It's back in the warehouse proper, surrounded by rooms full of X rays of Alaska-pipeline welds, films of NCAA football games, sacks of hybrid sorghum seed, and tons of corporate records, all coated with a fine layer of salt. The bank office itself is twenty-two feet

wide by seventy-five feet long. Its walls, one of which is a solid slab of salt, are bare. It is furnished with thirteen old desks and chairs and an assortment of antiquated office equipment.

But John Nolan seems satisfied with the place. A gaunt and gray-haired retired Air Force officer, Nolan is the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City's emergency-preparedness coordinator. "I feel kind of sheltered down here myself," he said. "Our emergency operating center used to be in Topeka, but in 1961 the government ran a test exercise, and the results showed Topeka being hit pretty hard by the Russians. We went to the Department of Defense for targeting information and decided Hutchinson was a low-risk area. We could probably go to the surface here within two weeks after an attack."

Nolan was down in the mine that day to take part in a semiannual test of the emergency facility's communications equipment. After a lunch of TV dinners in the UVS staff kitchen, Nolan entered the bank's office to the strains of "Moon River" coming in over the sound system and sat down at a Telex machine to send and receive messages from the emergency relocation centers of the eleven other Federal Reserve Banks.

"Most centers just send some dumb thing," Nolan said while he waited. A firm believer in civil defense, he was taking the opportunity to send a more pointed message: "The British are advocating that enough food should be kept on hand for twenty-eight days. Many experts are now advising even longer periods of shelter occupation—the battle could last intermittently for months. Is your relo site properly stocked?"

Nolan's is. The mine has its own water tank, and at the rear of the warehouse, in a dark, low-ceilinged, mined-out area the size of a football field, the bank has stockpiled sleeping bags, pillows, clothing, and stacks of cartons full of Mountain House–brand freeze-dried chicken chop suey, spaghetti, chocolate pudding, granola, and other foods. The provisions will feed the 150 employees of the Kansas City bank and its three branches who are under standing orders to rush to the salt mine if so ordered after receiving word of an "advanced alert," indicating the possibility of imminent nuclear attack. Notice of the alert would be flashed to bank headquarters from FEMA, and members of the relocation team—who have been issued wallet cards with a "phone tree" illustrating to whom they should relay the message after it is relayed to them—would spread the news. (The message will be passed along "*only* to the member of the staff being called and *not* to [the] member's family," the card admonishes.)

"People are due to come here from every department," Nolan said. "Check collection, auditing, all of them." (The *National Plan for Emergency Preparedness* states that, following a nuclear attack, provision is to be made "for the clearance of checks, including those drawn on destroyed banks.") So that employees will know where things stand after a nuclear war, the bank's salt-mine office adjoins a vault full of microfiche copies of current bank records. A new batch of records is brought from Kansas City, 225 miles away, every day. "We used to have exercises down here where teams would come in and actually reconstruct the records," Nolan said. "We don't do it anymore, because of budget cutbacks. But the tests worked. The records could be reconstructed."

> Newspaper sections have been prepared that tell what to take in an evacuation (credit cards, toilet paper, and your will, to mention three).

Nolan is confident that bank employees assigned to the mine will show up, as the mine will be open to their dependents. (UVS officials, however, express some concern about the mine employee who must stay on the surface, operating the elevator, as the mine fills up. "If that were me," commented one, "I'd say, 'The hell with you guys.'")

"We're expecting about four hundred people," Nolan said, "and we can hold them in here for a month or more. We have enough food for four hundred people for fourteen days at twenty-eight hundred calories a day. We could cut the rations in half easily if we had to."

The room where the four hundred people will sleep is dark now. It is a stark warehouse bay, fifty feet wide by three hundred feet long, that remains exactly as the salt miners left it. The cots have not been set up, but they are on hand; so are the flashlights the relocatees will have to use if the mine's generator, which is on the surface, is destroyed.

The bank options the space from the warehouse company for a nickel a foot a year, or $750 annually. "They'll pay a dollar a foot a year to exercise the option," said Michael Gingerich, UVS executive vice-president. "But if they ever need to use it, I don't think anybody will be too worried about the money."

You and Your Money

But there will be concern about the money. In fact, there already is.

"Victory in a nuclear war will belong to the country that recovers first," says a booklet distributed to banks by the Federal Reserve System, "and the financial community will bear a heavy burden of responsibility in effecting rapid recovery."

Thus, the book offers banks a number of tips on how to "minimize the effects of possible enemy attack." Banks should safeguard their records, the book says, and instruct employees on nuclear-war banking methods. And, in the event that a nuclear attack "interrupts regular payroll procedures," employees should preissue and store special payroll checks, printed on "distinctively colored paper," to hand out on postattack paydays.

More detailed directives are contained in red binders labeled "Emergency Operating Letters and Bulletins," which have been distributed to banks in the district supervised by the Kansas City Federal Reserve. (Similar directives have gone to banks in other parts of the country.) Included is a copy of the Treasury Department's Emergency Banking Regulation No. 1, which seeks to head off runs on banks by banning cash withdrawals "except for those purposes, and not in excess of those amounts, for which cash is customarily used."

These directives also advise that banks short of funds but holding government securities would do better "during the immediate postattack period" to borrow against the securities than to try to sell them "in an unfavorable market." All banks, however, are encouraged to continue selling U.S. Savings Bonds.

One of the greatest worries of postattack-finance planners is that our money economy may be replaced by a barter system. That "would result in a rapid loss of economic momentum and a low possibility of national survival," a governor of the Federal Reserve System warned a congressional committee in 1976. To ensure, first of all, that there *is* currency after an attack that destroys the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, banks have been in-

structed not to remove worn and damaged bills from circulation after a nuclear war. And the Federal Reserve, at its main relocation site near Culpeper, Virginia, maintains a large stockpile of currency.

"The old policy, from the early Sixties to the early Seventies, called for five billion notes in the stockpile," said Harry Guinter, the Federal Reserve's emergency coordinator. "It would have cost us fifty million dollars in printing costs to reach that goal. We raised the question, could we transport the cash from where it was squirreled away to where it was needed? We thought the country would have higher priorities for transportation."

Accordingly, in 1973 the stockpile goal was reduced to a number of bills equal to the excess of new bills issued over old bills turned in over a two-year period. By 1976 the stockpile was down to 700 million notes of mixed denominations. After that, Guinter said, it continued to shrink. "But not too long ago we sent over a large supply of two-dollar bills."

Probably the most detailed post–nuclear war financial plans have to do with the problem of postattack inflation. "A General Freeze Order will be issued and proclaimed by the Federal Government immediately after attack, freezing prices, wages, salaries and rents," FEMA literature announces. "This Federal Freeze Order will give the force of law to national policy and should be assumed to be in effect if a community or area is temporarily cut off."

The general freeze policy is clear-cut compared with another crucial matter that has received a lot of attention from economic planners: postattack tax policy.

"We have position papers on things you would go through to determine what tax policy should be," said Gary Robbins, a special assistant to the Undersecretary of the Treasury for Tax and Economic Affairs. "We would determine the policy at the time. The first thing you'd have to know is, do you still have enough information to reconstruct the tax account?"

That question was answered for Robbins last year at a FEMA-run "readiness exercise," one of a regular series of exercises at which planners from throughout the government get together at Mount Weather to play out postattack scenarios.

"We postulated that twenty-five percent of the country was hit," Robbins said. "The pattern of the attack ran along the East Coast, through Georgia, and then into the missile installations in the West. The results were interesting. The attack destroyed the entire capability of the United States to print money, and we were told there were no currency reserves. It was a frightening situation. East-West transportation was cut off. Communications were wiped out, and the explosions' electromagnetic pulse wiped out computer memories. In that situation, our current tax policy is absolutely meaningless. Employers have no records, so they can't fill out W-2 forms. Bank records are gone.

"Now you need a different kind of tax policy. You have to forgive all current taxes. If the attack happens on July 1, say, some people have paid withholding and some people have paid nothing, but you have to forgive and forget on both sides. It's not fair to some people, but it's too hard to figure out. Then you probably want to put on something like a sales tax. That's the simplest one to administer. Stores are already familiar with the system, and you don't want to have to train them at this point. The rate would probably be close to thirty percent—that equals the current government take—with absolutely no exceptions. If state and local governments were exempted, a black market would appear immediately."

One of the uses to which federal tax revenues would be put is another tricky matter. The *National Plan for Emergency Preparedness*, along with other recent planning documents, states: "The Federal Government would assure the equitable sharing of war losses throughout the economy to the extent possible, not to guarantee individuals against losses but to insure the maintenance of a viable economy."

Robbins explained: "You have to protect the banking system, the banks that have made loans on real assets. You want to reestablish the productive base of the United States. You want to give entrepreneurs enough money to start their businesses somewhere else. If you had seventeen Rembrandts, that's nice, but you won't be reimbursed for them, because they don't add much to your productivity. But a house is a part of the productive structure, because if you don't have a place to live, you can't go to work.

"In the exercise last year," he continued, "we were told that two trillion dollars' worth of property was destroyed. We assumed that ninety percent of the people who owned that property and the banks who lent money on it were within the radius of destruction. That left two hundred billion dollars to be compensated.

"The owners can't pay off the mortgages, but if they default, the banking system collapses. So the federal government is going to have to buy the destroyed assets. It will have to accept the mortgages and pay them off over time. The titles transfer to the federal government, which eventually can sell the property and recoup some of the expenses. That's one way to handle war losses."

And how would information on such a program be communicated to the surviving population?

"I'm not exactly certain," Robbins said. "You probably post it somewhere."

Preserving Our Values

There are, of course, plans for emergency radio and television broadcasts; in addition, newspaper supplements telling you how to dig a fallout shelter under your car and what things to take with you in an evacuation (credit cards, toilet paper, and your will, to mention three) have been prepared for rapid printing if a nuclear attack is ever considered imminent.

And even if all the plans come to nothing—if the attack catches Category A agencies by surprise, and people start using fifty-dollar bills for toilet paper, and mortgage payments fall behind, and the mail goes undelivered, and surviving Americans form tribes and battle one another for dusty cans of tuna fish—someday, maybe, as the result of one final bit of preattack preparation, those survivors' descendants will be able to find their way back to our traditional American values. And it is to preserving those values, after all, that all of these nuclear-war preparations, civilian and military, are dedicated. "Without this goal," points out a study done for FEMA by the SRI International Strategic Studies Center, "there is no reason for fighting."

Lest we forget, a special precautionary procedure is rehearsed each night at closing time at the National Archives. Under the building's great rotunda, a uniformed guard approaches the display case that holds the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights; hits a switch; and starts the documents on a long, slow descent into a fifty-ton vault that was designed specifically to protect them from fire, shock, heat, water—and atomic explosion. The vault, President Harry Truman said as he dedicated it in 1952, "is as safe from destruction as anything that the wit of modern man can devise.... So I confidently predict that what we are doing today is placing before the eyes of many generations to come the symbols of a living faith."

I watched one recent morning as a guard brought those symbols up from their mighty vault. The two leaves of the vault's lid, weighing five and six tons, opened one at a time, and crossed mechanical arms gradually straightened, raising the documents in their frames toward their display cases.

"We have a hot line to the Pentagon down in the guard's office," said Larry Oberg, an efficient and serious man who is in charge of security for the National Archives. "They'd call and say the attack is under way. The guard is supposed to come up here and activate this. I hope they get the right guard—one who's not going to run out and go home."

Oberg watched with pride and concern as the documents completed their morning ascent and slid snugly into their cases.

"As for me," he said, "I hope the first bomb falls right on my head, because I wouldn't want to be around anymore." G