

Preparing for the “Next War”: Civil Defense during the Truman Administration

Masako HATTORI

要 約

本稿は、トルーマン政権期の連邦民間防衛局（FCDA）が、民間防衛への市民の動員を目的に実施した一連の宣伝・教育事業に着目し、そこで将来の戦争がどう語られたかを考察する。民間防衛に関する従来の研究の多くは、1945年の夏に原爆が開発されて以来、民間防衛は原爆対策として行われるようになった、という前提に立つ。しかしながら、民間防衛を通じて人々が描いた戦争像は、果たして原爆の登場とともに即座に変化したのであろうか。

1940年代末の米ソ対立の危機的悪化を受けて設立されたFCDAは、全国的な民間防衛体制構築のために1750万人の市民の参加が必要であると想定し、人々に民間防衛の急務を訴えるための様々な事業に着手した。まず、各地で民間防衛の指導を担う人材の養成機関が設立され、卒業生は全米各地で市民の動員と指導に当たった。大学の研究機関や各種メディアも大きく貢献した。さらに、トルーマン期FCDAの一大事業として、1952年に一連の「アラート・アメリカ」事業が実施された。これは、民間防衛に関する展示品を載せたトラックが全国各地に出向き、訪問先で展示行事を催す企画を中心に、人々に民間防衛への参加を促そうとするものであった。展示では、現代戦の恐怖や民間防衛の手順が、人々の五感に訴える特殊効果を駆使して説明された。

以上の事業を通じ、米国本土が攻撃対象となる「次の戦争」では、敵は、原爆をその攻撃の中核としながらも、焼夷弾、細菌・化学兵器、破壊活動等を含むあらゆる攻撃手段を総動員して戦うと想定された。すなわち、市民を敵の攻撃による被害から守るべく民間防衛に精力を注いだ人々の間では、原爆の登場によって即座に戦争観が「核戦争」へと変化したわけではなかったのである。当時の人々の描いた「次の戦争」は、「核戦争」より、先の大戦の「総力戦」に近いものであった。

Introduction

“See the Show that may Save Your Life!”¹⁾

This rather strange, puzzling catchphrase appeared in newspaper advertisements, store windows, and theaters throughout the United States in 1952 as part of the “Alert America Convoys” conducted by the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA). This was a nationwide tour of exhibits intended to offer to the public “highly dramatic visualizations” of the fear of modern warfare and the know-how for civil defense.²⁾ Receiving official status as an independent agency in January 1951, the FCDA attempted various programs of civil defense in order to find ways to protect Americans and their properties from

¹⁾ Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Civil Defense Alert* [hereafter *CDA*] 1, no.11 (Washington DC: GPO, 1952): 5.

²⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951* (Washington DC: GPO, 1952), 15.

the ravages of future “enemy attacks” on U.S. homeland. The officials dedicated themselves to a range of programs such as commissioning studies, drawing up evacuation and shelter plans, training civil defense volunteers, and disseminating information on civil defense.

Much literature on U.S. civil defense has explained the effort in the context of how the government’s Cold War policies intruded into the lives of American people. These studies have made considerable achievement in revealing how McCarthyism, the Korean War, and other severe conditions of the Cold War surrounded the U.S. society and its people.³⁾ Thus, the “Alert America” appearing in some of these studies is explained as an example of government “propaganda”—how civil defense understated the power of the atomic bomb and contributed to the government’s efforts to gain public support for their Cold War policies.⁴⁾ The underlying assumption in these studies is that the dawn of the “atomic age” in the summer of 1945 fundamentally changed how people viewed the nature of war.⁵⁾ In other words, they assume that civil defense became directed at atomic weapons from the very moment the atomic bomb came into existence. In retrospect, indeed, the advent of the atomic bomb was a momentous turning point in the history of science and technology, diplomacy, and war. American people in 1945 surely had grasped, albeit with ambiguity, the extraordinary nature of this new weapon. Still, when considering how the atomic bomb transformed people’s images about what the “next war” would be like from those based on their experiences during the previous World Wars, a question remains of whether the invention of the atomic bomb in 1945 had immediately changed their views of war to something the later generations would call the “nuclear war”—a nightmare of Armageddon.

Such a perspective is derived from my concern that previous studies do not seem to fully explain why people who dedicated themselves to civil defense in the “atomic age” did so instead of solely relying on the military for national defense. To situate them merely in the context of propaganda would be to dismiss the serious efforts of the FCDA and other civil defense workers who tried to protect fellow Americans from future tragedy. This is especially so since many of them, including those in the FCDA, were not informed of critical information about atomic weapons.⁶⁾ Life with civil defense was a “reality” for those who

³⁾ Here I mainly referred to Andrew D. Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development during the Early Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁾ Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43; Grossman, *Dead nor Red*, 62–65, 72–79.

⁵⁾ Thomas J. Kerr, *Civil Defense in the U.S.: Bandaid for a Holocaust?* (Boulder: Westview, 1983), 6; Grossman, *Dead nor Red*, 16.

⁶⁾ Crucial information concerning atomic energy was concealed not only from the general public but also from those concerned with the issue such as many scientists and public officials. Lyon Gardiner Tyler Jr., “Civil Defense: The Impact of the Planning Years, 1945–1950” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1967), 239–40; McEnaney, *Civil Defense*, 29–30.

lived during that era. Thus, their rich and vivid history deserves further study.

Since myriads of policies were conducted by the FCDA, no brief overview can adequately narrate or analyze its history. Therefore, I will look into those policies concerned with spreading the ideas of civil defense to the public and mobilizing them into their programs, and situate “Alert America” as the culmination of these efforts in this period. Since the participation of a vast numbers of ordinary citizens was critical to civil defense, these “public education programs,” as the FCDA officials called them, were essential. I seek to argue that the view of war that the civil defense workers in this period envisioned as the “next war” was something closer to the “total war” vision of the World War II, situating the atomic bomb at its core but also as one of many weapons that a potential enemy might use. I do not intend to understate the government’s concealment of information concerning “national security,” the horror of nuclear weapons, and other dark Cold War legacies, but rather will try to explore the history of civil defense from a new perspective.

While civil defense in the U.S. has a long history up to this day, the story in this paper focuses on the years of President Harry S. Truman, the turbulent years which include the end of World War II and the beginning of another severe international situation symbolized by some crucial events such as the Soviet’s successful development of its own atomic bomb, the deterioration of the war in Korea, and the growing anti-Communist crusade at home. My story ends in late 1952, which coincides with the first successful detonation of a hydrogen bomb by the United States. Arguing whether the “next war” images were transformed as the appalling effects of this bomb came to be known from the mid-1950s, and whether or how those images interacted with the course of civil defense programs requires another series of in-depth examinations beyond the scope of this paper.

My interpretation advanced in this paper is mainly based on a review of pamphlets, newsletters, annual reports, and other materials produced by the FCDA, as well as contemporary studies done by universities and newspaper articles concerning civil defense.

1. The Beginning of Civil Defense

The history of civil defense can be traced back to the two World War periods. During the First World War, with the development of aircrafts and the rise of mass armies conscripted from the general public, the traditional distinction between combatants and non-combatants collapsed, and nations at war began to direct attacks on civilians. When German zeppelins assaulted English cities, the concept of civil defense came into being as a way to protect civilians from the effects of enemy attacks.⁷⁾

The idea of civil defense was soon introduced to the U.S., where it was exercised during the World Wars. Without serious danger of being attacked, however, the term mainly implied not so much preparation for actual military attacks but mobilization of popular support for the war. This purpose included maintaining anti-saboteur vigilance, promoting recruitment of

⁷⁾ Kerr, *Civil Defense*, 9-10.

the armed forces, and encouraging the sales of war bonds, just to name a few. Still, in these years, organizational precedents and basic ideas were established in the U.S. that offered a framework for civil defense planning in the post-WWII period.⁸⁾

The brutal, tragic war came to an end in August 1945 and Americans heartily celebrated the coming of peace. After the long period of suffering, people enjoyed the promise of a growing consumer economy and their new prosperity.⁹⁾ Yet, for those concerned with international relations, this postwar period was far from a long-awaited peace. The faith in “Fortress America”—a sense that the U.S. was protected by its geographic isolation—was shaken by the technological advances in war weapons, which seemed to make the U.S. homeland highly vulnerable to enemy attacks. The experience of “total war” established an assumption that there was no longer a clear distinction between combatants and non-combatants in a war. In addition, the memory of the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 produced a special fear of sudden, surprise attacks. As Washington pursued the construction of a national security state, “preparedness” became a key issue.¹⁰⁾

In the late 1940s, various civil defense studies were conducted in Washington which would serve as a basis for much of the thinking of civil defense planners in the following period. Among the most influential was the *Hopley Report*. Named after Russell J. Hopley, director of a temporary office established by the Secretary of Defense James Forrestal to prepare proposals for national civil defense, this report provided a blueprint of an operational civil defense organization for FCDA planners.¹¹⁾ It recommended that a federal office to direct civil defense be established, and that the organizing and operating of civil defense be the joint responsibility of federal and state governments with the participation of local communities throughout the U.S. It envisaged that those local communities would have well organized and trained units of volunteers—15 million men and women in total—to be prepared to meet “hazards of atomic or any other modern weapons” that an enemy might use.¹²⁾

In the meantime, issues concerning the atomic bomb prompted various public arguments. On the one hand, voices of unease were heard. For example, some people questioned the morality of the use of atomic bombs on civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki while a majority

⁸⁾ Ibid., 6–19; McEnaney, *Civil Defense*, 17–20; JoAnne Brown, “‘A is for Atom, B is for Bomb’: Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948–1963,” *Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 69; Allan M. Winkler, *Life under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (1993; repr., Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 109–11.

⁹⁾ Many scholarly works, including those on civil defense, have challenged this simple, blissful image of the postwar 1940s and the 1950s. For example, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

¹⁰⁾ In fact, the military departments had begun planning for the “next war” during World War II. What they envisioned was not a limited, short-term conflict but a “World War III.” Tyler, “Civil Defense,” 7–8.

¹¹⁾ U.S. Office of Civil Defense Planning, *Civil Defense for National Security* (Washington DC: GPO, 1948), 291.

¹²⁾ Those organizations were to operate in natural disasters as well. Ibid., 1–17.

of people accepted the explanation of the federal government that it had had a crucial role as a strategy to win the war and that it symbolized the technological and scientific accomplishment of the U.S.¹³⁾ One of the most influential was the Pulitzer-prize-winning journalist John Hersey's account entitled "Hiroshima," which appeared in the *New Yorker* on August 31, 1946. Its dreadful descriptions shocked many Americans who had hardly been informed of how "ordinary citizens" had suffered the event.¹⁴⁾ How to manage atomic energy was also a serious subject to them. The failure of the United Nations' conference on the international control of atomic energy seemed to reject the prospect of U.S.–Soviet cooperation on this matter.¹⁵⁾ On the other hand, however, peaceful use of atomic energy also seemed to promise a brilliant future. Atomic cars, atomic pills, and other dreams that had been depicted in science fiction novels suddenly seemed realizable.¹⁶⁾ Was the atomic energy a good or an evil? This question was never resolved.

The United States' monopoly on atomic bombs suddenly ended in August 1949 with the successful Soviet detonation of its own atomic bomb. The Truman Administration's supposed "loss of China" in October 1949 and the opening of the Korean War in June 1950 accelerated the fear toward Soviet aggression. Congressman John F. Kennedy warned the public that the slowness of civil defense planning made the U.S. vulnerable to an "atomic Pearl Harbor." Other anxious politicians, scientists, and citizens pressured the administration for something more than mere studies.¹⁷⁾ The answer was the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950 which created the FDCA.

According to this act, an "enemy attack" meant any attack by an enemy of the U.S. which might cause substantial damage to civilian properties or persons by sabotage, or by atomic, chemical, bacteriological, or any other weapons or processes. The term "civil defense" meant all activities and measures designed or undertaken to minimize the effects on the civilian population caused by such an attack, to deal with the immediate emergency conditions, and to effectuate emergency repairs and restoration of the vital utilities destroyed.¹⁸⁾

¹³⁾ Many historical works have been written concerning American people and the use of atomic bombs on Japanese cities. See Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Michael J. Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Robert J. Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half-Century of Denial* (New York: Avon Books, 1995).

¹⁴⁾ The article was later published as a book. John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Knopf, 1946). For a detailed study on the impact of Hersey's "Hiroshima" on Americans, see Michael J. Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience: The Reception of 'Hiroshima,'" *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (1974): 24–49.

¹⁵⁾ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985; repr., Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 52–58.

¹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, Part 4, 5; Winkler, *Life under a Cloud*, Chap. 6.

¹⁷⁾ "Defense Lack Seen as 'Pearl Harbor,'" *New York Times* [hereafter *NYT*], Oct. 10, 1949; McEnaney, *Civil Defense*, 12–15.

¹⁸⁾ "Public Law 920 [Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950]," in FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 90.

2. Public Education of the FCDA

Given the nature of its mission, it was clear that the FCDA programs required the cooperation of various people and agencies. In the course of policy planning, the planners referred to academic professionals for surveys and researches, as well as to the *Hopley Report* and other studies done previously. Soon they came up with the estimation that the involvement of 17.5 million citizens was needed in order to sustain an efficient nationwide civil defense system. As table 1 shows, in its first years the FCDA designated eleven services for these civil defense volunteers.¹⁹⁾ Two points in this categorization require attention.

First, it shows that the U.S. consisted of “target areas” and “support areas.” Not many people knew exactly where the assumed “target areas” were. According to “Project East River,” a report presented to the federal government by a consortium of research universities, 100 major cities, areas, and industrial centers in the U.S. and Canada were selected as primary target areas of an enemy attack.²⁰⁾ The “support areas” represented other relatively rural areas where, in the aftermath of an attack against the target areas, people were expected to take care of the refugees or to rush to those devastated areas as rescuers.²¹⁾

Services	Men and women workers per 1,000 population	
	Target area	Support area
Emergency welfare	14.0	14.0
Engineering	19.0	13.0
Fire	3.4	2.0
Health and special weapons defense	39.0	8.0
Police	4.0	4.0
Rescue	2.4	1.0
Staff and miscellaneous	5.0	5.0
Training and education	1.0	1.0
Transportation	19.0	13.0
Warden	38.0	10.0
Warning and communications	2.0	1.0
Total	146.8	72.0

Table I. Volunteer services needed for civil defense.

Source: FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 20.

¹⁹⁾ The services changed from time to time, which reflects the FCDA’s uncertainty about what the sufficient and realistic civil defense would be like. FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 20; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952* (Washington DC: GPO, 1953), 73.

²⁰⁾ I argue in the next section of this paper that the Alert America Convoys covered many of these target areas.

²¹⁾ “Project East River” was conducted by the Associated Universities, an university consortium hired by the Department of Defense, the National Security Resources Board (NSRB, a federal agency which dealt with industrial protection in the event of an attack), and the FCDA to develop comprehensive plans for national defense. Associated Universities, “Project East River: Destructive Threat of Atomic Weapons, Part III of Project East River,” 18–22, Sept. 1952, NSRB, Box 19, Record Group 304, National Archives, Maryland; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 19–20.

Second, the table indicates that the quota of people required for “Health and special weapons defense” services was set considerably high. These people were expected to detect radiological, chemical or biological contamination and to treat the casualties suffering from enemy attacks.²²⁾ This coincides with the definition of the Civil Defense Act of 1950. In other words, the officials of civil defense imagined the “enemy attack” as a combination of various means of war, including these sneaky, invisible weapons located at home, as well as combat planes and atomic bombs coming from the sky.

Based on this calculation, new civil defense volunteers were needed immediately. Data from a survey conducted in September 1950 by another university institute, the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, illustrated that many citizens showed a willingness to participate in civil defense, but that one-third of them had not heard any detailed information about it.²³⁾ Recruiting 17.5 million workers was definitely not a task that the FCDA could manage on its own. Therefore, they embarked on training local civil defense leaders who would give instructions to other citizens at the local level.

The Federal Civil Defense Staff College was established in Maryland in April 1951 to cover this task. The establishment of three Training Schools in Oklahoma, California, and Pennsylvania soon followed. The Staff College was intended to instruct state and local administrators on topics such as military and international situations, plans and policies for organization and training of civil defense, and practical operations under attack. In contrast, the Training Schools were expected to train instructors who would contribute to the education in local communities. Courses on rescue, first-aid, and other specialized phases of civil defense were provided there.²⁴⁾ The FCDA reported that 3,800 people graduated from one of these schools by the end of 1952. They took leadership in 650 local civil defense schools established throughout the nation from which 200,000 people graduated by this year.²⁵⁾

The use of mass media was another major tactic of the FCDA. Newspaper articles, television programs, and movies were distributed under the leadership of this agency. The FCDA also published a large amount of pamphlets and booklets concerning civil defense information and activities which totaled over 55,000,000 in 1951.²⁶⁾

²²⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 52–55.

²³⁾ Since 1946, this center had been conducting studies on the reactions of people to the threat of war. The FCDA commissioned the center to study people’s perceptions of war, atomic bomb, civil defense, and other related subjects. “A Preliminary Report on Public Attitudes toward Civil Defense,” in Dennis Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive Atomic Attack: The Truman Administration’s Civil Defense Program*, vol. 26 of *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency* ([Bethesda, MD]: University Publications of America, 1999), 517–27; Stephen B. Withey, *4th Survey of Public Knowledge and Attitudes Concerning Civil Defense: A Report of a National Study in March, 1954* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1954), iii, 18–19.

²⁴⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 21–23; *CDA* 1, no.1 (1951): 1–2; *CDA* 1, no.2 (1951): 4, 6; *CDA* 1, no.9 (1952): 1; *CDA* 1, no.12 (1952): 2.

²⁵⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 2.

²⁶⁾ “How Civil Defense Built Public Interest,” *Tide*, April 11, 1952; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 10–11, 46; McEnaney, *Civil Defense*, 35–36.

By the end of 1951, the FCDA officials were confident that their public education programs were making substantial progress, but the fact that only 1.9 million people had volunteered for civil defense by that time clearly demonstrated that they were still far from their goal of recruiting 17.5 million citizens.²⁷⁾ How should they mobilize more people? The second survey carried out by the Survey Research Center revealed that almost half of the respondents had not heard or read that local authorities were recruiting volunteers. It pointed out that the distribution of information was still insufficient.²⁸⁾ Then, the answer seemed to be to inform the public, or “Alert America,” in a more direct form “to bring home the job of civil defense to the man who needs it the most—the man on the street.”²⁹⁾

3. Going on the Road: The Alert America Convoys Tour the Nation

(1) The Planning

The Alert America Campaign was launched in late 1951 and implemented during 1952. The main part of this campaign was the Alert America Convoy, which were trailer-truck tours designed to show “exhibits of war destruction and home defense techniques across the country” and to spur the recruitment of civil defense volunteers.³⁰⁾

To some extent, the planning of the campaign was stimulated from the outside. For example, the National Advisory Council for the FCDA referred to the Survey Research Center reports, and declared in June 1951 that “a campaign to alert America” (the slogan was adopted here) was a matter of great urgency to overcome “public apathy” toward civil defense.³¹⁾ A conference of concerned civil defense leaders from thirty-two states also adopted a resolution criticizing the FCDA for its “slowness” in advancing civil defense.³²⁾ In replying to these demands, the FCDA promised to launch the “Alert America” campaign which consisted of three major objectives: first, to inform “American citizens about fundamentals of self-protection” from various types of weapons; second, to motivate them to volunteer and participate in local civil defense activities; and third, to create “public recognition of civil defense as the co-equal partner of the military in the common defense of the country.” The Alert America Convoy was situated at the core of this campaign.³³⁾

For assistance in its planning and implementation, the FCDA drew considerably on a

²⁷⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, v, 19–20; CDA 1, no.9 (1952): 6, 7; CDA 1, no.10 (1952): 1.

²⁸⁾ “Preliminary Report on Public Attitudes,” 517–27; CDA 1, no.12 (1952): 6.

²⁹⁾ “Alert U.S. Convoy to Arrive May 17,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1952.

³⁰⁾ “Defense Exhibits Going on the Road,” *NYT*, Oct. 12, 1951.

³¹⁾ This council consisted of six governors and mayors, and six people from the general public “on the basis of their qualifications and interest in the matters affecting the national interest.” “Alert U.S.’ Drive Urged on Apathy,” *Washington Post* [hereafter *Post*], June 17, 1951; “Alert America Campaign: Progress Report,” in Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive*, 322–23; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 71–72.

³²⁾ “States Seek Data on Civil Defense,” *NYT*, Sept. 22, 1951.

³³⁾ “Alert America Campaign: Progress Report,” 322–36.

non-profit organization called the Advertising Council. Famous for creating “Rosie the Riveter,” this consortium of advertising agencies and corporate advertisers had been contributing to government propaganda efforts from the World War II period by offering public services.³⁴⁾

The Advertising Council’s relations with the FCDA had begun in March 1951. An advertising executive from Johnson & Johnson Inc. led this partnership as volunteer coordinator, with the support of the then world’s second largest advertising agency, Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, Inc. The Council led various FCDA projects such as distributing civil defense pamphlets and producing “recruitment kits” for civil defense workers.³⁵⁾

The project of the Convoy was announced to the public at a press conference on October 11, 1951. It was called a “Paul Revere on wheels” to appeal to people’s patriotism and urgent action.³⁶⁾ A non-profit organization named the Valley Forge Foundation (clearly, a patriotic name) was set up specifically to handle this project. With the support of this NPO and the Advertising Council, the FCDA planners hastened to elaborate the plan in the latter half of 1951.³⁷⁾ They decided that a unit of ten 32-foot trailer trucks painted red, white, and blue would make a convoy, and three identical convoys would tour around the nation. Each convoy was to travel the East, the Central States, and the South through the Pacific Coast respectively, stopping at scheduled cities to hold exhibits. The Department of Defense provided the truck drivers.³⁸⁾ The convoys were scheduled to visit the principal target areas to diffuse critical information to those who needed it most, and ultimately cover all forty-eight states. Each exhibit was to be set up in an armory, exhibit hall, or other public spaces, and remain there for approximately three to five days. It was originally planned to occupy a space of 55 by 100 feet, “somewhat larger than a standard basketball court.”³⁹⁾ The actual exhibit covered an area of 120 by 160 feet. It was “the

³⁴⁾ On the history of the Council, see Robert Griffith, “The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942–1960,” *Business History Review* 57 (1983): 388–412; Daniel Lee Lykins, “Total War to Total Diplomacy: The Advertising Council, Domestic Propaganda and Cold War Consensus” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 1998).

³⁵⁾ This kit contained materials such as advertisement mats, recruiting speeches, radio fact sheets and announcements, and window display suggestions. It was available free of charge. *CDA* 1, no.8 (1952): 1, 7; “Status Report—January to July 1952, Government Public Service Campaigns,” July 1952, in Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive*, 649–51; McEnaney, *Civil Defense*, 35.

³⁶⁾ *CDA* 1, no.7 (1951): 1, 7; “Defense Exhibits Going on the Road,” *NYT*, Oct. 12, 1951.

³⁷⁾ The executives in the Foundation included war veterans, university professors, Congressmen, and other prominent opinion leaders. “Defense Exhibits Going on the Road,” *NYT*, Oct. 12, 1951; Millard Caldwell, to Matthew J. Connelly, Secretary to the President, letter with attachment, Dec. 11, 1951, in Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive*, 370–72.

³⁸⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 47; J.J. Wadsworth, Deputy Director of FCDA, to Secretary of Defense, Nov. 2, 1951, in Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive*, 345.

³⁹⁾ *CDA* 1, no.7 (1951): 1, 7.

largest public service show ever taken on tour in this country,” the FCDA boasted.⁴⁰⁾

In the meanwhile, publicity activities were also set forward. In Washington D.C., for example, forty-five different advertisements produced by the Advertising Council with a total of more than 11,000 lines appeared in four daily newspapers before and while the exhibit was held. It goes without saying that news, editorials, photographs and other information related to Alert America also appeared in these newspapers. Radio listeners heard more than 1,000 spot-announcements as well as eighteen special shows on local networks or on the “Voice of America.” Live shows and coverage was also broadcast on the new visual medium of television, although radio was still more popular at this time.⁴¹⁾ In addition, the Boy Scouts of Washington distributed red, white, and blue streamers and placards urging the public to see “the show that may save your life,” which were displayed in windows of many business establishments and on taxicabs, in hotel lobbies, theaters, restaurants, and other public spaces.⁴²⁾

(2) The Exhibit

As the curtains rose in cities throughout the country, what did the visitors see at the event? At the entrance and exit of an U-shaped exhibit room stood the figure of Paul Revere to greet them (figure 1).

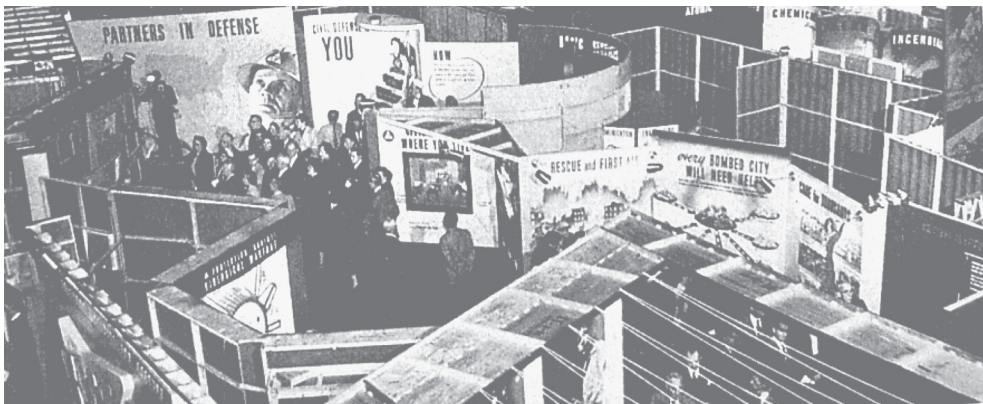


Figure 1. An overhead view of a part of the Alert America exhibit.

Source: *CDA* 1, no.9 (1952): 8.

The exhibit was divided into three phases. The theme of the first section was “Americans at peace and at war.” It opened with a panel explaining how humans had expanded their world

⁴⁰⁾ Caldwell to Connelly, 370–72; “Alert America Campaign: Progress Report,” 324; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 47–48; “Alert Show Aims to Draw CD Recruits,” *Post*, Dec. 30, 1951; “Defense Display in Hempstead,” *NYT* Jan. 19, 1952.

⁴¹⁾ Beth Bailey et al., *The Fifties Chronicle* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publication International, 2006), 128.

⁴²⁾ “The Alert America Convoy Comes to Washington!” Jan. 1952, in Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive*, 452–67; *CDA* 1, no.9 (1952): 5.

through scientific discoveries. Then they discovered the atom. What would the future world be like due to this important discovery? “Will it be this?” First introduced were the industrial, agricultural, and other peaceful uses of atomic energy. “[O]r will it be this?” Next came a series of images of fearful modern warfare. Fears of sabotage were expressed by repeated flashes which highlighted the vividness of a fake plant explosion; psychological warfare was described in pictures pasted randomly on the wall which symbolized doubt, suspicion, fear and panic; and incendiary warfare was depicted by simulated flames and a display of actual incendiary bombs. A model of germ warfare blighting a sheaf of corn and a retort with simulated nerve gas bubbles representing chemical warfare were also on display to aggravate the visitors’ sense of fear.⁴³⁾

The second section of the exhibit included a show of City X, which represented “a typical American community.” Stepping into a dark room, visitors found a three-dimensional diorama of City X and over it the words: “This could be YOUR city.” They heard someone warning that “if war comes to America, here’s what happens to you.” It was Edward R. Murrow, prominent journalist and a mass-media figure. A moment later, air-raid sirens sounded the alert and a voice of someone ordering defense forces to take up their emergency stations was heard. Enemy planes came into view and flak bursts followed. As the visitors’ tension reached a climax, an atomic bomb plummeted into the city with “the ominous whistling sound.” The mushroom cloud appeared, while most buildings had “disappeared, leaving only burning rubbles.”

Thus, this show intended to reveal the real horror of modern warfare “without civil defense.” The voice of Murrow encouraged visitors that “we can beat this menace” with civil defense, and a picture of a mother and her son standing in the debris was highlighted with a beam of hope.

Led to the third section of the exhibit, visitors were welcomed with a panel asserting that “Civil defense is YOU,” and that civil defense was a “co-partner with the military.” Here, a revolving turntable and a flashing model of the “attack warning system” explained to them the volunteer actions that they should undertake. Other displays also portrayed basic steps and techniques of self-protection and mutual aid—two responsibilities that the citizens were required to bear. “Half of the casualties could be avoided through proper defense precautions,” the exhibit emphasized.

Finally, the visitors got through “one of the most moving parts” of the exhibit, where panels symbolizing “America’s freedom” were displayed along with banks of live flowers and “typical American music.”⁴⁴⁾ As they left the main exhibit room, they were invited to

⁴³⁾ “What You Will See in the Civil Defense Alert America Exhibit,” program, Jan. 1952, in Merrill ed., *Preparing to Survive*, 471–89; Caldwell to Connelly, 370–72; “Defense Display on in Hempstead,” *NYT*, Jan. 19, 1952; “Alert America` Exhibit Ready as Graphic Civil Defense Aid,” *Post*, Jan. 6, 1952; “City to be Alerted on Defense Perils,” *NYT*, May 11, 1952. Hereafter, I referred to these sources for the descriptions about the three parts of the exhibit.

⁴⁴⁾ Unfortunately, I could not identify what kind of music this had been.

volunteer for civil defense and take some booklets home. Outside were supplementary civil defense features such as rescue truck demonstrations, radiological equipment, and fire-fighting devices.⁴⁵⁾

(3) The Outcome

In Washington D.C., the grand opening of the nationwide tour was announced on January 7, 1952. The exhibit was scheduled to be held in an auditorium located at the center of the capital for the duration of six days. The District Civil Defense Commissioners eagerly proclaimed this period to be the local “Civil Defense Week” to stimulate greater public interest in the city’s civil defense programs. In fact, although the commissioners had hoped to have 100,000 volunteers signed up by that time, they had only been able to recruit one-third of that number.⁴⁶⁾

Overall, the organizers reported that the exhibit was a “success.” Being held over for another day, more than 32,000 people visited the exhibit during the duration of a week, and 3,500 of them enrolled as civil defense volunteers. Local newspapers reported that officers were urgently calling for additional instructors to teach the new applicants that had flowed into the office that week.⁴⁷⁾

In New York City, the exhibit was open from May 12 to 19 at an army armory. The rhetoric of patriotism to mobilize the public was clearly seen here. As the Alert America convoy arrived in the city, Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri greeted the drivers, most of whom were veterans of World War II or the Korean War, and proclaimed the opening of the city’s “Alert America Week.”⁴⁸⁾ On the day of the public opening, nearly one out of five adults who visited the exhibit signed up for civil defense, considerably above the national average.⁴⁹⁾ A part of the exhibit room occupied an exhibit of the city’s own civil defense programs which hammered the theme: “Know your freedoms, Live your freedoms, Guard your freedoms.”⁵⁰⁾ Held at Times Square was an Alert America rally, which included a performance by the

⁴⁵⁾ Much of these supplementary devices were provided locally. For example, in Chicago, visitors of fifteen to eighteen years old were given free airplane rides in privately owned “civil air patrol planes” departing from a nearby airport. “Parade Opens Civil Defense Show by Lake,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 4, 1952.

⁴⁶⁾ FCDA encouraged local agencies to hold these “civil defense weeks.” Caldwell to Connelly, 371; “Jan. 7-12 to Be Civil Defense Week Here,” *Post*, Dec. 7, 1951; *CDA* 1, no.7 (1951): 1.

⁴⁷⁾ “Alert America Convoy Comes to Washington!” 451-68; *CDA* 1, no.8 (1952): 1; “Jan. 7-12 to Be Civil Defense Week Here,” *Post*, Dec. 7, 1951; “Alert America’ is Held Over,” *Post*, Jan. 13, 1952; “More Instructors are Needed for CD Applicants,” *Post*, Jan. 27, 1952.

⁴⁸⁾ “City to be Alerted on Defense Perils,” *NYT*, May 11, 1952; “Defense Exhibits Previewed Here,” *NYT*, May 13, 1952.

⁴⁹⁾ One out of sixteen visitors signed up nationwide. “Wallander Calls for Civil Defense Aides,” *NYT*, May 14, 1952; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 49.

⁵⁰⁾ “Defense Exhibits Previewed Here,” *NYT*, May 13, 1952.

popular singer June Valli, who sang the National Anthem under the Stars and Stripes while 1,500 New Yorkers stood at attention.⁵¹⁾

Interestingly, the “New York Industry for Defense Week” arranged by the New York City Department of Commerce also took place, with the participation of a twenty-eight foot trailer truck of the Naval Bureau of Ordnance containing another exhibit. According to newspaper reports, this exhibit included “torpedoes, guns and rockets, and objects made of plastic, steel, felt, and copper produced by small businesses” designed to show how those small manufacturers had “a place in the defense effort.”⁵²⁾ This example implies that civil defense was introduced as a potential business opportunity as well as a patriotic service.

At about the same time, in May 1952, another convoy arrived in Los Angeles, being greeted by a twenty-two-year-old “Miss Alert America” who placed leis of carnations around the truck drivers.⁵³⁾ According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a group of American-Japanese who had survived the atomic bomb in Hiroshima was invited to tell their experiences. For example, Jean Kanda had been just eight blocks from the center of the blast, and Micky Nagamoto had had her hair and most of her clothing burned off.⁵⁴⁾ It is not easy to state why the planners invited the Hiroshima survivors to speak and what the audience thought. In one sense, the planners seem to have intended to stir the sense of fear of the audience toward the atomic bomb. In another sense, however, the survivors may have unintentionally reassured the visitors that the atomic bomb was terrifying but also survivable.

Would atomic attacks really be survivable? What would “sufficient” civil defense look like? Such ambiguity underlay the whole event without anyone giving a clear answer. In New York City, when a student press conference with civil defense officials was held as a preliminary event to the Alert America exhibit, a high school boy who had experienced bombings in Europe during World War II expressed his fear toward the city’s civil defense policy of using school corridors as shelters. He insisted that they might be flattened in an attack. In response, one of the officials tried to reassure him that the corridors used in school buildings were “relatively the safest area” in schools and that those school corridors as shelters gave students a “better chance” of survival even if a blast occurred nearby—unless it happened at the very point. Yet, he added that as high school students the boys were old enough to understand that “I can’t give you a life insurance policy.”⁵⁵⁾ Thus, the mood in Alert America was both optimistic and pessimistic at the same time. While showy entertainments attempted to attract the public, other aspects revealed the vague uneasiness

⁵¹⁾ “Wallander Calls for Civil Defense Aides,” *NYT*, May 14, 1952.

⁵²⁾ *Ibid.*; “City to be Alerted on Defense Perils,” *NYT*, May 11, 1952.

⁵³⁾ The mayor of Los Angeles was a member of the National Advisory Council which insisted on the planning of Alert America. “‘Alert America’ Convoy Welcomed,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1952; *CDA* 1 no. 9 (1952): 7; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 71–72.

⁵⁴⁾ “Hiroshima Blast Witnesses Speak,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1952.

⁵⁵⁾ “Boy Bomb Survivor Fears Our Shelters,” *NYT*, May 6, 1952.

that people—the planners as well as the audience—had toward the “next war.”

In its *Annual Report for 1952*, the FCDA evaluated the outcome of this project. According to this report, the three convoys visited eighty-two cities in thirty-six states and Washington D.C. In response to “numerous requests from State and local civil-defense authorities and from various State fairs,” they were proud that the convoys had been rearranged to visit additional cities.⁵⁶⁾ Obviously, this result did not fulfill their initial goal to cover all forty-eight states. However, considering that one of the main purposes of this exhibit was to give critical information to people in the “target areas,” it is likely that priority was given to visiting those areas as well as the cities which had shown enthusiasm for additional exhibits. In fact, as shown in figure 2, the convoys mainly concentrated on visiting the cities with large populations or industrial centers in the East, the West Coast and the Midwest. Fifty-eight of the cities which the convoys covered were those “target areas.”⁵⁷⁾



Figure 2. The cities where the Alert America convoys visited.

The dots represent the cities visited. Data from: FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 48; U.S. Department of Interior, *Nationalatlas.gov*, <http://www.nationalatlas.gov> (accessed Sept. 1, 2008).

⁵⁶⁾ CDA 2, no.1 (1952): 1, 8.

⁵⁷⁾ Out of the one hundred areas which the “Project East River” selected as “target areas,” four were those in Canada. Metropolitan areas such as New York and Los Angeles were divided into several districts, so they counted more than one area each. Considering these facts, fifty-eight cities which the convoys covered meant that they actually covered approximately seventy out of ninety-six target areas. FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 48; Associated Universities, “Project East River: Destructive Threat of Atomic Weapons,” 18–22.

Consequently, the total attendance nationwide was 1,108,472, the average attendance in each exhibit was 13,518, and the number of those signed up for civil defense was 67,171. Moreover, the FCDA stressed that the convoys had created “a tremendous amount of public interest” in civil defense among the 67 million residents of the cities visited.⁵⁸⁾

In short, those who enrolled themselves in civil defense work at the Alert America exhibit were approximately one out of sixteen visitors. To evaluate the meanings of this result does not go beyond assumption since details about how many of the visitors were those who had already signed up for civil defense before the exhibit were not offered in FCDA reports. If most visitors were those who had been enrolled in civil defense previously, the actual portion of new enrollments at the exhibit would have been much higher than the number given above. If this was the case, however, it would also mean that the exhibit only drew those who already had certain interest in civil defense, and that the FCDA failed to attract a larger population. By contrast, if many of the visitors were those who previously had not had much interest in civil defense, the results would imply that the publicity activities of the FCDA made a considerable achievement in attracting those local residents, but that the contents of the exhibit itself did not convince those visitors of the need for volunteering in civil defense.

In any case, these kinds of face-to-face programs of public education continued. In 1953, civil defense exhibits were shown to over 850 million people at 135 conventions, state fairs, and professional meetings. One of the three Alert America convoys was loaned to Canada, to be included in a tour of seven trailer trucks which covered a route of more than 10,000 miles to visit key Canadian cities under the slogan of “On Guard, Canada.”⁵⁹⁾

Finally, to what extent did the FCDA organizers achieve their goal concerning public education during the Truman years? The number of civil defense volunteers increased from 1.9 million in 1951 to 4 million at the end of 1952. Although this was still far from their initial goal to recruit 17.5 million people, this result enabled those involved in civil defense to pin their hopes on projects undertaken in the following years.⁶⁰⁾ In fact, the “success” of the Alert America Campaign led to public education programs somewhat more operational, complicated, and large-scale in the following period.⁶¹⁾

Conclusion

The Cold War indeed prompted the formulation of postwar civil defense. At the same

⁵⁸⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 46–49.

⁵⁹⁾ CDA 2, no.2 (1952): 2; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1953* (Washington DC: GPO, 1954), 72–75; “Mobile Exhibit Returns after Tour of Canada,” *Post*, Dec. 16, 1953. For comparative analysis on civil defense in the U.S., Canada, and Britain, see Tracy C. Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁶⁰⁾ FCDA, *Annual Report for 1951*, 19; FCDA, *Annual Report for 1952*, 2, 56.

⁶¹⁾ For example, massive nation-wide drills named “Operation Alert” were repeated between 1954 and 1960. Oakes, *Imaginary War*, 84–96.

time, many of the central rhetoric and methods used here, such as the use of patriotism and the allure of business opportunity, were not fully unique or new to the Cold War era. Likewise, although the weapon itself was new, the atomic bomb was not offered a distinct position in the public education programs of the FCDA during the Truman years, and its images remained just as ambiguous as those in the late 1940s when people had debated whether atomic energy was an evil or not. As the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950 included any type of war measure as part of an “enemy attack,” as the need of volunteers to tackle special weapons was emphasized, and as the Alert America exhibit devoted considerable space to display sabotage, incendiary bombs, and other modern warfare, civil defense efforts were not only targeted at atomic attacks. Similarly, while the FCDA emphasized the vast explosiveness of the atomic bomb as a main war measure of a future enemy, they also situated the bomb as something that could be met with civil defense measures designed for other weapons.

The ways in which the atomic bomb appeared in civil defense is inextricably linked with the ways in which civil defense workers in this period visualized the “next war” situated in the U.S. homeland. That is, the atomic bomb appeared as one of many weapons, which suggests that the people envisioned a future war not exactly as a “nuclear war” but rather close to a “total war.” If so, when and how did their images gradually or suddenly transform into an image of a “nuclear war” when referred to nuclear weapons? This question is left for further study.

Finally, this conclusion also implies that civil defense in the early Cold War era had considerable continuity from the “pre-atomic” period in terms of the ways in which the people viewed war.⁶²⁾ This questions the assumption of many previous studies which divides the history of civil defense into the “pre-atomic” and the “atomic” age. My next step, then, is to explore civil defense in the “pre-atomic” age, which has not been a major subject in the historiography of civil defense. I believe that to focus on the continuities and discontinuities between these two periods would deepen our understandings of the meanings of “civil defense” in the United States. This, I hope, would also contribute to the sophisticated efforts of rethinking the meanings of “Cold War culture.”⁶³⁾

⁶²⁾ Kerr, *Civil Defense*, 10.

⁶³⁾ For thoughtful arguments on this issue, see Peter J. Kuznick, and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).