

Lincoln High School Air-Raid Drill, 1950

By Mel Junghans, Oregon Journal Collection

This photograph originally appeared in the *Oregon Journal* as an illustration for an article by Dan Flanagan, titled "Portland Schools Map Air Raid Precautions." The air raid drills were the result of a request by John F. Griffith, assistant superintendent of Portland public schools, who requested that each school establish and practice air raid plans. During the drills, students were organized by classroom and were led by their respective teachers.

On August 29, 1949, Americans lost their short-lived status as the world's only nation with nuclear weapons when the Soviet Union successfully detonated an atomic bomb. U.S-Soviet relations had already become antagonistic as a result of the Soviet blockade of Berlin and expansion into Poland and Eastern Europe. In the United States, the fear of nuclear attack spurred some communities to begin preparing for the worst.

In 1951, Congress created the Federal Civil Defense Administration, giving it the responsibility to help communities help protect themselves. Public schools quickly became a favored location for civil defense education programs since they were already integrated with local communities. Air raid drills became common place in schools across America, particularly after the 1951 release of the now-iconic film, *Duck and Cover*. With the help of the upbeat cartoon character, Bert the Turtle, *Duck and Cover* advised children to take cover at the first flash of a nuclear blast or first sound of a warning siren. In order to be "protected" children were encouraged to "duck to avoid the things flying through the air," and then "cover to keep from getting cut or even badly burned." School children were also encouraged to wear metal identification tags, so that in the event of a nuclear attack, their bodies would be able to be identified by survivors.

During the first half of the twentieth century, schools were often constructed with large windows forming "walls of light" across the entire length of many classrooms. However, at the dawn of the atomic age, those same windows became known as "walls of death," giving cause for the rapid evacuation of classrooms during air raid drills. Consequently, students were instructed to take refuge in hallways, auditoriums, and basements at the first sign of attack.

Further Reading: Brown, JoAnne. "A is for Atom, B is for Bomb": Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948 – 1963. *Journal of American History* 75, 1988: 68-90.

Rose, Kenneth D. *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York, N.Y., 2001.

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