



From toys to tags and terror: Children as young as six were forced to prepare for nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War ... and even had ready-made DOG TAGS so their parents could identify their bodies in the event of a nuclear fallout

- School districts nationwide outfitted their students with inexpensive dog tags as a civil defense measure
- The dog tags were most commonly stamped with the child's name, address, date of birth, phone number and religion for final rites
- The effort was promoted by the Federal Civil Defense Administration in posters, pamphlets, films and radio segments
- Educators also contemplated tattooing children, but decided against it because the markings wouldn't be legible once their skin peeled off after a nuclear blast

By JORDAN GASS-POORE FOR DAILYMAIL.COM

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Dorothy Fletcher's seventh grade classroom seemed as good a place as any to die.

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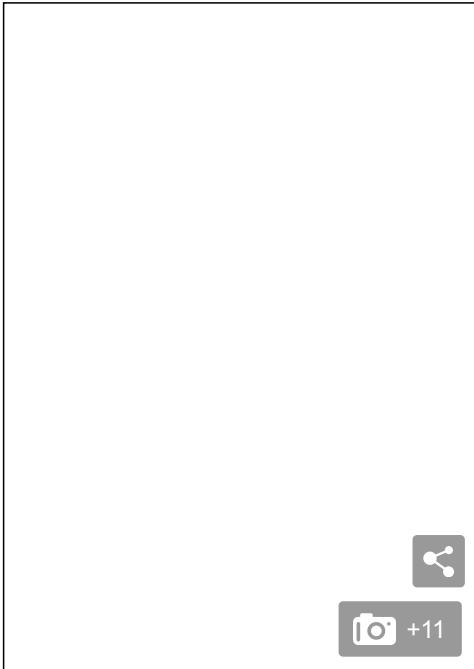
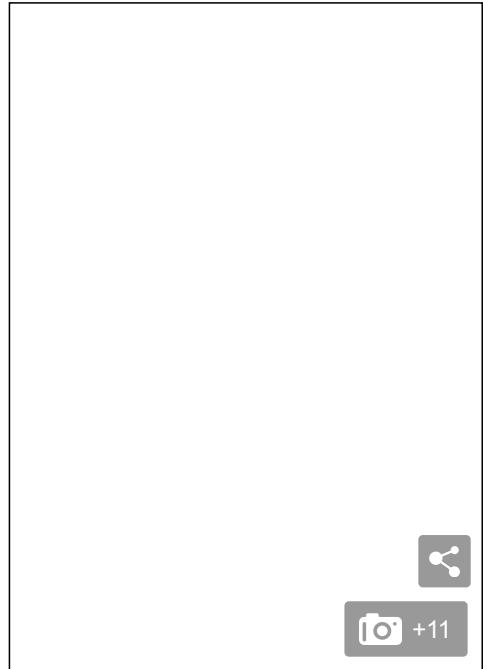
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It was 1962 and the risk of war with the Soviet Union was high. At any moment, she felt, an atomic bomb could drop on Jacksonville, **Florida**, considered 'ground zero' because of its naval bases, and poof – 12-year-old Fletcher and her classmates would be obliterated.

But at least she wore her military-style dog tag.

Scroll down for video



Dorothy Fletcher (left), pictured around nine years old in this school photo from 1959, was encouraged by educators in Jacksonville, Florida, to wear a military-style dog tag (right) – stamped with her name, address, father's name, date of birth, phone number and religion for final rites – in case soldiers needed to identify her remains after a nuclear explosion

In the early 1950s, school districts nationwide outfitted students like Fletcher with such dog tags with the unspoken purpose that they would help identify the children's charred remains after a nuclear explosion. It was the era of 'duck and cover' and children were on the front lines.

At this time, Americans lived under the shadow of the atomic bomb and constantly had to be prepared for the worst. Proof of this was hanging from around their children's necks.

For Fletcher, her dog tag is a bizarre childhood artifact of typical life in 1950s/1960s America. She and many of her peers in Jacksonville didn't understand the full ramifications of wearing these necklaces and regular 'duck and cover' drills until years later.

'It's pretty spooky now, but they didn't let on that they were spooky,' said Fletcher, now a 67-year-old retired high school English teacher. 'We thought they were necklaces.'

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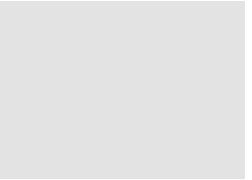
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School districts nationwide outfitted their students with these inexpensive dog tags as a civil defense measure. This necklace from a boy in Las Vegas lists his name, address and blood type

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Although the purchase of the dog tags was voluntary, parents were encouraged by the districts to get them for their children. Here Cub Scout Steven Matthews, 9, compare with Bonny Krieger, 4, at a San Francisco elementary school in this undated photo

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Fletcher's parents bought her the inexpensive metal dog tag – stamped with her name, address, father's name, date of birth, phone number and religion for final rites – when she was eight. Although this purchase was voluntary, parents were encouraged by the school district to get the markers for their children.

'It didn't seem like such a strange thing because we all wore one,' she said.

New York City Department of Education was the first to issue the dog tags in February of 1952, spending \$159,000, today \$1,469,730, to provide them to 2.5million students, according to historian JoAnne Brown.

By April of that year almost every child in the city from kindergarten to fourth grade had a tag with their name on it. They were instructed to wear them at all times, Brown explained in her 1988 paper on civil defense during the Cold War, while she was working as an associate history professor at Johns Hopkins University.

Children in many other cities received dog tags made of either metal or plastic that adults hoped would allow for easy identification should the Cold War turn hot.

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New York City's school system was the first to issue the dog tags in February of 1952, spending \$159,000, today \$1,469,730, to provide them to 2.5million students. Student Rebecca Anapol displays her dog tag in this photo taken in 1951 at an unidentified school

But educators weren't just considering dog tags to identify children's bodies if the unthinkable occurred. They also contemplated even stranger tagging methods.

William M. Lamers, the assistant superintendent of Milwaukee schools, thought about tattooing children, but decided against it because the markings wouldn't be legible once their skin peeled off after a nuclear blast, according to a 1951 article for the Journal of the National Education Association.

Marking clothing wasn't going to work to identify children because it could 'destroyed' and was 'frequently interchanged', wrote Lamers. At the time, fingerprinting was considered an 'infringement of privacy', and identification could be easily 'worn out, stolen or destroyed.'

Some parents, driven to desperation, sought out local engravers to have dog tags made for their Cold War kids, according to reports at the time. San Francisco, Seattle distributed the necklaces for free, while Philadelphia residents could

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them in local stores. Strapped for money, the Denver and Detroit school districts urged parents to put name tags in their children's clothes.

In a sobering video from 1955, students in Las Vegas speak to the press about the importance of the dog tags. At the end, a young boy explains matter-of-factly how the necklace will help soldiers identify his body.

By normalizing the discussion of collective death, the government could control children's fear of communism and nuclear annihilation, Fletcher said. It got to a point where they learned to stop worrying and love the bomb.

On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union surprised the US when it successfully tested its first atomic bomb. This event ended America's monopoly on atomic weaponry and launched the Cold War.

The Cold War changed the meaning of civil defense. Unlike World War II, when the government drafted citizens to ration items, collect scrap metal and grow Victory Gardens, there was little for people to do in the 1950s but prepare for a nuclear holocaust.

To help pitch the cause, President Truman created the Federal Civil Defense Administration in January 1951. The agency, similar to today's Homeland Security Department, developed curricula for public schools and distributed pamphlets, films and radio segments.

Most famously, the Federal Civil Defense Administration popularized the cartoon character Bert the Turtle, star of the short classroom film Duck and Cover. The amiable Bert demonstrated to children how, in the event of an attack, to 'duck to avoid things flying through the air' and 'cover to keep from getting cut or badly burned.'



Children in many other cities received dog tags made of either metal or plastic. This effort was promoted by the Federal Civil Defense Administration in posters (pictured), pamphlets, films and radio segments



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President Truman created the Federal Civil Defense Administration in January 1951 to protect citizens from an enemy attack. The agency's administrator, Val Peterson (right), issued dog tags to Las Vegas schoolchildren on April 24, 1955

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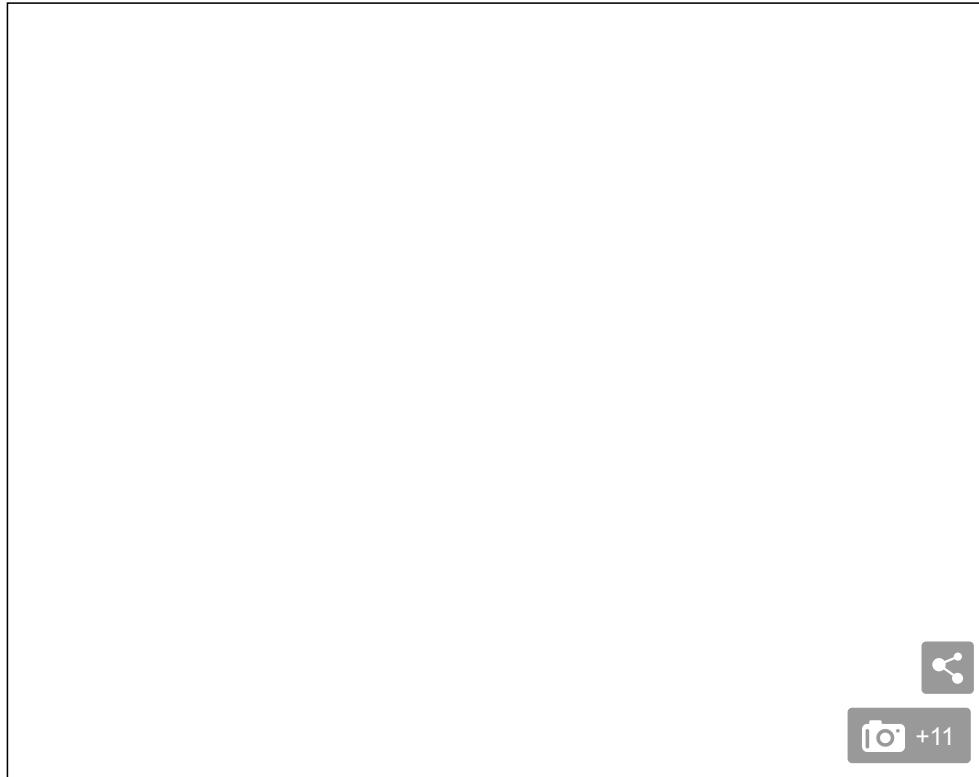
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The Federal Civil Defense Administration popularized the cartoon character Bert the Turtle, star of the short classroom film Duck and Cover. The film was shown in schools nationwide from the early 1950s until 1991 as part of the government's public awareness campaign



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In the film, Bert demonstrates to children how, in the event of an attack, to 'duck to avoid things flying through the air' and 'cover to keep from getting cut or badly burned.' Students at a Brooklyn middle school in 1962 practice the drill in preparation for a nuclear attack

Duck and Cover became an icon of the Cold War and was shown in schools from the early 1950s until 1991, when some historians believe the war officially ended.

Fletcher remembered watching the film in class and the chorus of its catchy theme song.

Even before the Federal Civil Defense Administration was created, major cities were undertaking biweekly or monthly air raid drills. Teachers would randomly order their students to drop and the children would crouch and bury their faces in their arms in the 'atomic head clutch position'.

Training wasn't about the technology of the bomb or the effects of an explosion. It was more about how students should behave, emphasizing the '3 Rs': Rights, Respects and Responsibilities, according to the New York Board of Education. With that in mind, schools were supposed to train children in self-reliance and survival techniques.

Children taught to duck and cover in event of nuclear blast



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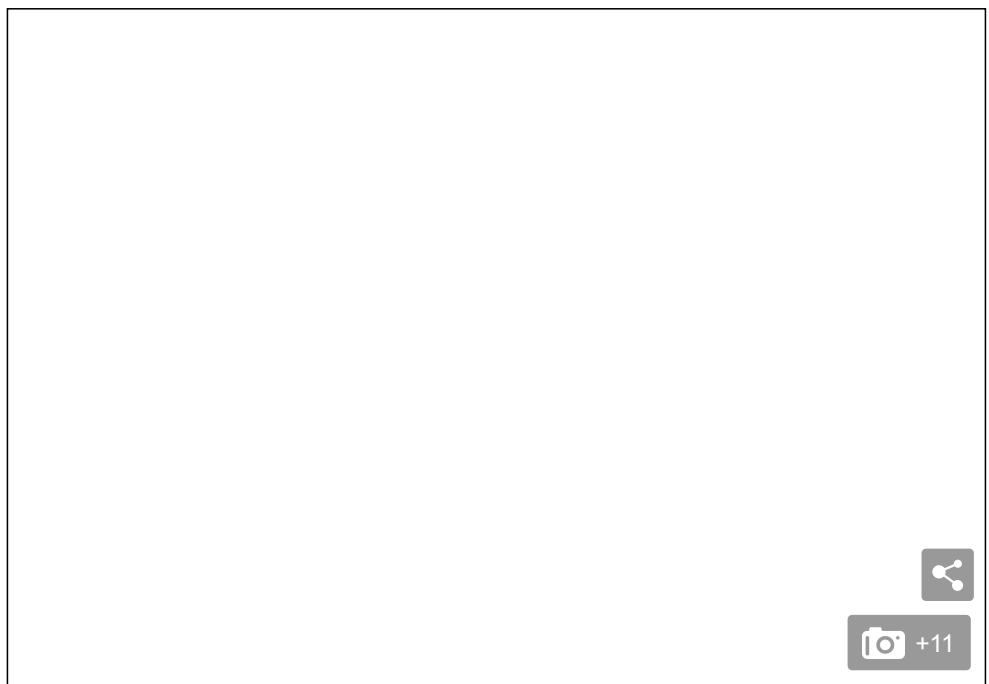
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Teachers from Chicago (left) to Topeka, Kansas, (right) would randomly order their students to drop and the children would crouch and bury their faces in their arms in the 'atomic head clutch position' during air raid drills



Schools were supposed to train children in self-reliance and survival techniques. Here music teacher Betty Moorehead plays the guitar and Mary Jo Schulz sings to entertain stud Mitchell Elementary School in Golden, Colorado, during a unique two-hour air raid c

To gain the support of parents, the Federal Civil Defense Administration served homes to reassure them that their children's training was based on information from 'competent experts' in the atomic field.

There seems to have been a lack of public information about the consequences of the atomic bomb in the early 1950s, with the Atomic Energy Commission actively minimizing the known effects of radiation, Brown wrote.

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Virtually no factual material on the effects of an atomic bomb appeared in educational materials or history textbooks at this time, she added.

Fletcher said her parents told her that if she heard the siren's blare she was supposed to seek shelter until after the atomic bomb had fallen. What they failed to mention was her school would be conducting drills to prepare for such a dreaded event.

'The first time I heard a siren, I got hysterical,' said Fletcher. 'No one told me about the drills. I'm afraid I'm going to lose the dog, dad and everything. It was pretty crazy and sad.'

Some of these sirens are still perched atop rickety towers around Jacksonville as reminders of America's jittery past, she said.

The Federal Civil Defense Administration emphasized controlling panic, of being alert but not alarmed. They introduced several types of air raid drills, with 'duck and cover' being the most common.

There were also advance warning drills that usually involved moving classes to school basements or shelters and dispersal drills that were mainly tested on the east coast.

If an air raid siren sounded in Jacksonville, students were instructed to walk two blocks and get on a train to Hastings, more than 50 miles away, where their parents would pick them up, Fletcher said. That wouldn't have been far enough away to survive a nuclear blast, she added, but the drills gave them hope.

'We were, in those days, pretty compliant,' said Fletcher. 'Only in hindsight I think about the absurdity of it all.'

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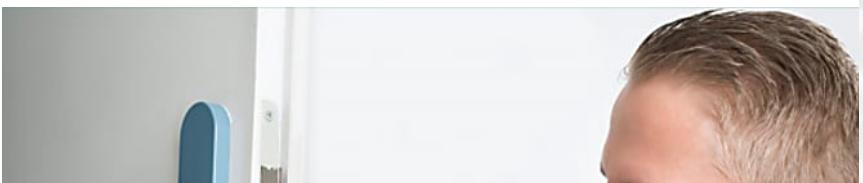
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► Jessica Simpson hits the slopes with daughter Maxwell and brother-in-law Evan Ross during family trip to Aspen, Colorado
Hitting the slopes

► 'I nearly burst into tears': Fatboy Slim became emotional listening to his viral Right Here, Right Now remix that samples Greta Thunberg

► Kris Jenner is picture perfect wearing a vibrant green gown for dinner with Corey Gamble in St. Barts

► Disney star Devan Leos avoids jail in attempted murder case in LA over car incident with man in 7-Eleven parking lot

► Kylie Minogue enjoys a break on Rottnest Island as she glams up for a photo shoot... after starring in a \$15m Tourism Australia campaign

► Eyes on the prize: Rafael Nadal jets into Perth for the inaugural ATP Cup... after a brief honeymoon with wife Xisca Perelló

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► Kim Kardashian's BFF Larsa Pippen showcases her dangerous curves in yellow skintight pantsuit
Made a bold fashion statement

► Jennifer Lopez indulges in post-Christmas furniture

**TODAY'S
TOP VIDEOS**

► social media followers
to choose a name for
her unborn baby girl
Options included Shay,
Presley and Selena

► Tori Spelling looks like
BFFs with her
husband's ex Mary Jo
Eustace in selfie... years
after cheating scandal:
'I never thought this pic
would happen'

► Star Wars: The Rise of
Skywalker writers
weren't trying to
'sideline' Rose Tico...
after fans speak out
about Kelly Marie Tran's
beloved character

► Sir Tom Jones, 79,
admits he eyes up
women in their thirties
but confesses 'it's
mostly the
grandmothers who
fancy me'

► Mariah Carey braves
the snow for a spot of
shopping at Louis
Vuitton in Aspen with
her beau Bryan Tanaka

► 'Oh God!' You star
Penn Badgley
accidentally lets slip
that psychotic stalker
Joe Goldberg WILL
return for a third season
of hit Netflix show

► Mark Wahlberg's wife
Rhea sizzles in a thong
swimsuit while chiseled
actor displays his
washboard abs on
holiday in Barbados

EXCLUSIVE Meghan
and Harry's \$14m
holiday hideaway
revealed: Royals spent
first Christmas with
baby Archie at
Canadian waterfront
mansion

► Jenna Dewan flaunts

TODAY'S TOP VIDEOS

► Anthony Joshua shows off his sporting prowess as he goes jet skiing off the shores of Barbados during festive break... weeks after huge boxing victory

► Vanessa Hudgens is a candid cutie as she enjoys the holidays in Switzerland... after announcing 2020 clothing line and album on Instagram

► Tammy Hembrow showcases her sensational figure in a skimpy bikini top and matching pants as she enjoys an idyllic Bali getaway

► Victoria Beckham is praised by close pal Eva Longoria as they spend Christmas together... amid claims her fashion empire is battling huge debt

► James Packer and girlfriend Kylie Lim trudge through the snow in Aspen as they enjoy a quiet Christmas with friends
Mariah Carey's ex

► Suki Waterhouse is in high spirits as she steps out WITHOUT an engagement ring after Robert Pattinson proposal rumors

► Disney actor Stoney Westmoreland, 49, who is accused of trying to have sex with a 13-year-old boy, claims the judge in his case has a bias against gay people

► Magician Criss Angel posts heartbreakng photos of his five-year-old son Johnny in chemotherapy and reveals his cancer has relapsed

► 'I don't want to fall apart in public': James May, 56, admits he could quit The Grand Tour because he's 'developing nervous



**TODAY'S
TOP VIDEOS**