

STATE OF ALABAMA  
CIVIL DEFENSE DEPARTMENT  
Montgomery 4

19 October 1953

Address by Mrs. Katherine G. Howard  
Deputy Administrator, Federal Civil  
Defense Administration, before the  
Assembly of Women's Organizations  
for National Security, at the Hotel  
Statler, Washington, D. C., at 10:30 A.M.  
Saturday, October 3, 1953

SECURITY AT HOME

Not long ago, at a Washington dinner party, a friendly foreign visitor was reviewing for an American official the things that had impressed him most about America in this age of peril in which we all live.

Our visitor was in accord with every defense measure we were taking, it seemed, except our nationwide Civil Defense program. Its importance was being blown up out of all proportion to the dangers we face on this side of the Atlantic, he thought. And he could not see why our plain ordinary citizens should be consulted about it, in any case.

"Look at my country," our visitor told his American listener. "We live right next door to the Russians. We would be the first to suffer if trouble came. Yet we are not nearly so concerned about our civilian populations as you are, here in the United States. But of course," he added reflectively, "our nation has been over-run many times in its centuries of history. Each time, homes have been destroyed and thousands of families have been separated. Helpless civilians have suffered injuries, starvation, even death. It is all very terrible, you understand, but that is what war does to one's homeland. By now our people are used to it."



Under the circumstances, the American's reply was a very well considered one, I think, "That's just it," he pointed out politely. "Over here, we don't intend to get used to it."

And of course, that is the crux of our concern for security here at home. Not only are we determined that we shall not be exposed to recurrent attacks on our homes and families, but we have been uniquely successful in fending off such attacks from beyond our borders for a full seven generations of American life.

Not for some 140 years has our nation been exposed to a foreign invader. That is a proud record, and in its pride lie both our historical strength and our present day weakness. For no one really knows any longer, ourselves included, just how we would react to mass attack on our own cities and towns and villages.

The question is one of skill and experience, of course, rather than one of national character. No one doubts the courage and resourcefulness of the American people in the face of a common danger. But it has been a very long time since the rifle and the plow played an equal part in opening up new lands for our pioneer ancestors. And there are very few Americans left alive who shared the everyday civilian tragedies and terrors of our War between the States. Ruin and pillage have long passed from common experience in this great country of ours, happily enough, and we -- who have had no shortage of military heroes abroad -- have had little call of late to display civilian heroism at home.

Meanwhile the success of the American dream inevitably has brought us, a peaceful people, to the commanding heights of world power. Today the winds of destiny blow strong against our exposed pinnacle, and dark clouds roll toward us from another quarter of the globe.



Our development of the A-bomb and the H-bomb, recently paralleled by the Russians, threatens our fondest hopes for international freedom and peace. And for the first time in almost a century and a half, our own great cities lie open to enemy attack.

All this has happened because a new force for conquest and destruction has come into being. As citizens of a free nation, we find it hard to understand the full implications of this destructive new force as it might be used against us by a few evil men at the head of a powerful military dictatorship.

It is almost as though the world was living again in the days of ancient Greece, when Philip of Macedon first used the phalanx as a sort of thousand-legged tank to crush all opposition. Before the free people of the time could recover from the shock of that new military invention, Alexander the Great had turned it against the Persians and was the conqueror of all he surveyed.

The Persians, it seems, were a little slow in recognizing the phalanx as a threat to their own security. We too, have had forced upon us with dizzying speed the need for comprehending the threat of the A-bomb and the H-bomb in alien hands.

These rapid new developments are not easy to accept and absorb. We resent the mental effort they entail, and are inclined to complain with Aeschines, the Greek orator of Alexander's day, "What is there in the list of strange and unexpected events that has not occurred in our time? Our lives have transcended the limits of humanity. We are born to serve as a theme of incredible tales to posterity."

Already the people of Hiroshima have served as the theme for such tales, and the people of Nagasaki as well. It is possible -- it is very, very possible -- that the people of Pittsburgh or



Portland or Boston or Baton Rouge may serve as such a theme in the future. That is why we have Civil Defense. Quite simply, it is the aim of our national Civil Defense program to insure that the tale shall have a different ending here in the United State of America.

The task is not hopeless. Nothing we are asked to do by way of Civil Defense is beyond the capability of the average housewife and mother. I am convinced, as a woman in a top policy-making position in our nation's overall defense program, that the incredible tale of our time can have a more fortunate outcome for many more American families than seemed possible at first glance. I believe it will have such an outcome, in fact -- but only if all of us learn the measures we must take for our own self-protection and begin putting them into practice immediately -- at home, at work, and at school.

The only alternative for most of us, either in an H-bomb attack or in a mass assault with A-bombs and other terror weapons, is to do nothing for our own salvation and take the calculated risk that we, individually, will be out of range if something happens. Our problem is one of individual responsibility. The choice -- everyone's choice, if "choice" is the word -- is starkly limited. Either we must get ready to protect ourselves, our families and our homes, or we must take a chance on being somewhere else when and if disaster strikes. And since there really aren't many places to hide and still be within reach of our jobs, our homes and our schools, we'd better be ready, just in case.

Now how do we get ready for an attack on whole populations; an attack aimed not at uniformed men in the field, but at unarmed civilians in our great production centers and on our farms?



Obviously, the first step is to study the enemy's attack capabilities.

Since 1952 the Federal Civil Defense Administration has assumed, on the basis of intelligence reports and the conclusions of our military leaders, that the Soviet Union has the capability of striking any target in the United States. The main attack presumably would be delivered by air, and would consist principally of atomic weapons detonated above ground during normal working hours -- when congestion in our cities is heaviest. Additional weapons might be used simultaneously, such as high explosive and incendiary bombs, biological and chemical weapons, sabotage, and psychological warfare to induce panic.

The initial airborne attack would be pressed home on us by some 400 bombers carrying enough atomic and other bombs to strike all our major metropolitan and industrial areas. This assumption is within the accepted capability of the Soviets, and at least 70 per cent of those bombers would get through our military defenses. The objective of the initial attack would be to drive us to our knees with a single knock-out blow. If it failed, subsequent attacks probably would be less heavy.

Bombs used would be at least 2 1/2 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bombs, and warning time for the civilian population might be very short -- perhaps as little as 15 minutes. The most likely targets would be the 80 critical target areas listed in a recent and public Civil Defense news release. Those critical target areas include about two-thirds of our population, most of our skilled workmen, and the bulk of our productive defense plant and equipment.

For each bomb dropped successfully, it is calculated that casualties would total 110,000 killed and wounded. Of the wounded,



73,000 would survive the first day, and 55,000 eventually would recover. On the basis of a perfectly possible distribution pattern of 100 bombs on our principal cities total casualties might amount to 11,000,000 men, women and children lost in a matter of hours.

To meet a disaster of this magnitude, Civil Defense must concern itself with readiness in two areas. There must be a readiness in things, such as medical supplies and rescue equipment. And there also must be a readiness of people. Not only must doctors and nurses and first aid people, and auxiliary policemen, and firemen, and utility workers be ready -- but plain ordinary people must be ready, too; people whose chances of escaping with a whole skin or, at worst, minor injuries can be doubled if they know what to do when the warning signal sounds.

Getting ready the things we need for Civil Defense is comparatively simple. It requires mostly money -- though Congress has not always shown an awareness of that fact. However, since such things as burn dressings and surgical equipment and fire trucks and bulldozers and spare water pipe need to be stored only once, we are gradually accumulating some semblance of a readiness in things, as represented by our emergency Civil Defense stockpiles throughout the country.

We do not have adequate supplies of many things still, and in some types of medical supplies we have only enough for a very few days of post-disaster need. But we are making progress in assembling things as fast as Congressional appropriations will allow.

I am happier -- very much happier -- about our gains in the readiness of people. For us in the Federal Civil Defense Administration, as for your own State and local Civil Defense Directors,



the problem of an alert and prepared people divides itself into three parts. We need first of all, of course, a hard core of skilled professionals in the many and complex crafts that enable our modern civilization to function.

If you will ask around a bit in your own communities, I think you will find that your electric light and power people, and your gas man, and your sewage and water plant employees, and many of your local contractors and their crews, have had Civil Defense briefing. So have your bus and cab drivers, and your communications workers, and your policemen and your firemen. They have taken part in test rehearsals. They know what would be expected of them if an emergency occurred. And they are ready, as always, to do their duty to the last man and woman.

These invaluable specialists had to be enlisted first because Civil Defense is -- first of all -- an extension of the regular protective services upon which you depend for the safety of your home. You will find, in fact, that a sizeable proportion of the more than 4 million Civil Defense workers on our books today is made up of this same hard core of specialists plus other government and municipal employees and industrial workers, and we can thank our lucky stars for their diligence and sincerity.

The next group of people that concerns us is that blessed band of volunteers upon whom every community must depend for hard unselfish service toward the common good. I include here the block wardens and the rescue crews and the first aid trainees who have given so much of their time and effort to the learning and practicing of their responsibilities.



I include also the doctors and nurses who have sacrificed what little spare time they have to the study of health services and special weapons defense against radio-activity, nerve gas, and other modern threats to our civilian population. In many states and cities this sort of readiness on the part of skilled and willing people has produced gratifying Civil Defense results.

In others -- and perhaps your community is among them -- Civil Defense progress has been agonizingly slow. To be quite frank about it, that may be in part your fault. The Civil Defense Act of 1950 declared it to be the intent of Congress to vest the operating responsibility for Civil Defense in the States and their political subdivisions; meaning the counties, the cities, and those most irreducible of all political subdivisions -- yourselves. According to law, it is up to you and other responsible citizens to prod your local Civil Defense organizations into action if results are not already evident.

Admittedly, we need a closer gearing of local Civil Defense performance to national plan. But as the law now reads, that sort of gearing cannot and must not be master-minded from Washington. It is a home town responsibility. The only appeal from that responsibility is to your own conscience, your own sense of civic duty.

Your Federal Civil Defense Administration can install, and has installed, emergency control centers for operating in close coordination with the States and cities under attack conditions. I was the first woman to view some of these secret installations. They are marvels of efficiency, but they will do your communities no good if you do not have adequate local Civil Defense organizations which can respond to official directions in time of attack.



Your Federal Civil Defense Administration can and has set up a nationwide attack warning system capable of alerting all our critical target cities in less than two minutes. I was the first woman to see some of this equipment, too. It is wonderfully fast and effective. But an attack warning relayed to your home cities will do you little good if you cannot hear your local sirens, or if you have too few sirens, or none.

Your Federal Civil Defense Administration can and has set up a country-wide emergency broadcasting system by which all official Civil Defense information will be transmitted to you by your local broadcasting stations during attack periods, on Channels 640 and 1240 of your standard radios only. This information cannot reach you if you and other people fail to mark your radio dials, or if you have not been told to turn to the proper channels promptly in time of disaster.

Your Federal Civil Defense Administration can make available matching funds to help your community buy the many kinds of emergency supplies and equipment it would require to save your homes and families. That money is of no use to your community if your town council or state legislature refuses to appropriate its half share of the necessary funds.

Your Federal Civil Defense Administration can and does sponsor studies of your local Civil Defense needs under attack conditions. Those studies are not of much value if the forms on which they depend are left to lie in a desk drawer somewhere. Your local situation must be studied on the spot, and studied carefully, so that you know what emergency resources are lacking in your community and what you need to do to improve them.



Your Federal Civil Defense Administration can and does produce public education booklets, home shelter manuals, family action exercises, educational films, radio scripts and television shows. But even they will be wasted if too few people read, watch or listen -- and learn how to protect themselves.

And so you see that any report on the progress of Civil Defense -- on the security of your homes -- always must come back to what you are doing, personally and organization-wise, in your own communities.

I think you will find, if you live in a critical target area, that much has been done and is being done. But I know you will find, too, that a great deal remains to be done toward adequate local Civil Defense organization, not by the Federal Government, but by the people who live in the area.

Your home cities need your help and that of your members, and they need it badly. The attack assumptions I mentioned earlier were based on A-bombs 2 1/2 times as powerful as the Hiroshima type. The H-bomb, which now confronts us, is many, many times more powerful.

In other words, the attack threat mounts with each passing hour and with every new development in weapons. We can easily seem to make progress in Civil Defense, yet still lose ground. And, in a sense, that is pretty much what is happening in many of your communities right now.

Thus everything in Civil Defense boils down, in the end, to the readiness of the individual and the family to withstand attack. In case of a mass assault upon your community there would be only two kinds of people left afterward -- those who needed help, and those who could help.



The difference between the two might very well lie in the amount of Civil Defense information, training, organization and practise your community has had. And those are things that cannot be imposed upon your home neighborhoods from without. They must spring from within; from sober, adult realization of the security problems we face, and from intellectual and moral conviction that we must do something about those problems -- personally and collectively.

Such conviction is not uncommon in this land of the free. It comes even more easily to women, I think, than to men -- at least when community welfare is at stake. Our churches are built on conviction; and so are our schools and hospitals and charities. If these great institutions are worthy of preservation -- and our hearts tell us that they are -- then our homes must be vastly more worthy still, and our country most worthy of all.

Maxwell Anderson, in his great play called "Valley Forge," had General Washington say to his despairing officers, "This Liberty will seem an easy thing, when no one any longer needs to die for it."

Yet how much harder it is for us, sometimes, to live for the freedoms we cherish. Civil Defense is a way to live calmly and courageously in a troubled world, and to keep on living. It is a way to work -- and work hard -- for the things we Americans believe in, and to win acceptance for those beliefs. But it is not an easy way, because there is no easy way to security. That is why our local Civil Defense organizations must have the active participation and support of women everywhere.

I know they will get that support in increasing measure from the organizations represented in this room. Indeed, I know many of you are giving Civil Defense your full support right now. For the interest and leadership you are furnishing to a great cause, your



country is sincerely grateful. I am sure your communities will be equally grateful in days to come. And, finally, as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Civil Defense program, I am grateful, too, for your help and counsel.

In my official capacity I have sat in on the secret meetings of our defense planners in the Pentagon, with other Civil Defense officials. After one such meeting I turned to the Book of Proverbs, where so many sound precepts have been distilled from the long human struggle to bring serenity and order to a troubled world. There I found the words of comfort and advice that seemed best suited to our problems today. "Wisdom is the principal thing," Solomon set down for us many centuries ago, "Therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding."

We are seeking to follow that precept today, in our Civil Defense planning. All planners try to be wise, of course, but I think most of us realize that mere human wisdom is not enough in this air-atomic age in which we live. We need understanding, too; very great understanding on the part of our people and their leaders at every level of government. And I think we are beginning to get it.

Indeed, I am confident that our American understanding of the new age of peril will be added to increasingly, and in greater measure, by the ablest voices in our land. In the future we should all be able not only to plan against disaster, but to build to the plan, strong in the informed faith and confident courage of our neighbors and families and friends.

And that, I think, is Civil Defense at its best.

Thank you.

FCDA-DC-11879