

In 1951, the American government, in consultation with the National Education Association, ordered the creation of a film instructing school children what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. Featuring a turtle named Bert, the film includes nuclear-explosion scenes culled from other government films.

Entitled *Duck and Cover*, the made-for-kids film was seen by millions of children throughout the United States. What was the point of a “duck-and-cover” strategy? Evacuating American cities, in the event of Soviet-fired atomic bombs, seemed impractical to the federal government. Where would people go?

Instead, the Federal Civil Defense Administration focused on more practical precautions such as “duck and cover” and underground bomb shelters. Instead of leaving their cities, if an air-raid siren sounded, Americans—the government urged—should seek shelter nearby.

The idea, behind “duck and cover,” was that people who were relatively close to “ground zero” could protect themselves from an exploded bomb’s blast winds - and flying debris - by hitting the ground, as soon as possible. Immediately thereafter, they needed to cover themselves with anything that could help avoid flash burns.

Government officials intended that Bert, the cheerful turtle, would help young children to be less afraid of a potential bomb attack.

The whole campaign, however, had a different impact on many American kids. It caused them to become even more afraid, as Dr. David Walbert—from LEARN NC (at “North Carolina Digital History”)—tells us in his “[Living with the Bomb](#)” article:

The cartoon turtle, the cheerful theme song, and the practical advice were supposed to reassure children who might worry about an atomic attack. Instead, the images of little Johnny diving off his bicycle convinced children that the bombs could fall at any moment and gave them nightmares.

During America's bomb-scare years, people built underground shelters and stocked them with enough food to last fourteen days.

Credits:

Film, produced for the U.S. Federal Civil Defense Administration by Archer Productions in 1951, online via [Archive.org](#).

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Duck-and-Cover-Civil-Defense-Film>

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