



Postscript: Be Prepared

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-- A Civil Defense Test Edition - The Events Described On This Page DID NOT Happen --

A
Civil Defense
TEST EDITION

THE McCOOK DAILY GAZETTE

FORECAST

Weather information omitted to prevent aiding the Enemy who rely on preparing to carry out a ground attack on the United States.

Volume 28--Number 120

NEA Features and News

McCook, NEBRASKA, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1953

United Press Latent Wire

Price Five Cents

Enemy Launches Sneak A-Bomb Attack on Many U. S. Cities! Denver Has 42,000 Dead; Omaha Toll Estimated at 25,000,

McCook Region Civil Defense Is Sent Aid Pleas

No Alabams fell on McCook or any other outstate town in Nebraska when the Enemy made a wholesale attack on American cities. But -- Except for having to count dead, injured and property losses, the responsibilities and commitments of outstate Nebraskans under the Civil Defense program were as real as if they had been subjected to a rain of A-bombs.

The entire Mobile Support resources of the McCook region have been called out to aid bomb-struck Denver, some aid must be given to Omaha as well.

Headlines of this paper, the first and only one in the McCook region, were at last filled with news of a sneak attack on Denver and Omaha.

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14,500 Denver Evacuees To Be Sent Here

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On the familiar landmark scene of downtown Denver, an artist has sketched here his conception of the atomic bomb blast which rained destruction on the Mile - High City. From reports indicated that the bomb fell at approximately Statecraft Avenue and Airpase Street. It is here that the fam-

Six Square Miles of Denver Laid Waste by A-Blast

(From Press and Emergency Facilities)
Denver, with an overall estimated population of 540,000, was left battered and all but helpless by the destructive force of an Enemy bomb, tossed during day-time hours when the downtown area was jam-packed by workers at their jobs, and thousands of shoppers and tourists from many states.

Bomb Cuts Wide Swath At Omaha

(From Press and Emergency Facilities)

Omaha, Nebraska's major city, located on the banks of the Missouri River, was one of the nation's many cities to be attacked by an atomic bomb when the enemy launched a sneak attack on the United States. Omaha's population of 130,000 was reduced to a few survivors.

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Five Areas For Mobile Support

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Civil Defense Group Five Area Is Huge

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“Several cases of near hysteria were reported in McCook and this territory last night. Contrary to rumors, no fatalities resulted,” said the *McCook Daily Gazette* on November 19, 1953, one day after the edition shown here landed on subscribers’ front porches. The fake headline quickly became a national news story.

Though it might seem like a twisted joke, the *Gazette* was in earnest about its “Civil Defense Edition.” A line above the nameplate and a front page editorial (below the fold, not shown here) advised readers that “The events described on this page of the McCook Daily Gazette did not happen. But every event described here could happen! . . . Could we carry on, if the Enemy struck, as well as the simulated news reports on this page say we carried on? We should ascertain the facts about that!”

After two years of national appeals for the public to get involved in civil defense, the *Gazette* editors apparently saw the need for some extra motivation. Consulting with experts, they wrote up a nuclear war scenario in which more than fifty U.S. cities were destroyed, and smaller communities like McCook were left to pick up the pieces.

And then—just as they imagined the Soviets

doing—the *Gazette* struck without warning with its special edition. And to ensure that officials didn’t miss the point about McCook’s commitment to preparedness, a stack of *Gazettes* was delivered to a Denver hotel where a five-state conference of civil defense administrators was underway. For some, this seemed like a rational response to an existential threat; if the *Gazette* terrified its neighbors, it did so with the most neighborly of intentions.

Not everyone appreciated the new national culture of fear, and some chose to ridicule it. In an attention-seeking broadcast stunt earlier that year, Omaha radio station KOWH briefly caused a panic by rebroadcasting Missouri River flood warnings from 1952. As Chris Rasmussen explains in the Spring 2012 issue of *Nebraska History* (pp. 40-41), “Like the impudent class clown, the station defended its trickery as a necessary measure in the atomic age; ‘the program was not designed to scare anyone, but to keep people awake to the ever-present threat of emergency.’” The station thus gave “its young listeners the thrill of vicarious rebellion.”

Because sometimes, apparently, you have to be prepared to laugh.

DAVID L. BRISTOW, EDITOR