

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM PROPOSAL

**MISLEADING PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF SAFETY  
AND THE GOLDSBORO B-52 BROKEN ARROW**

A PAPER WRITTEN BY MAGGIE MITCHELL FOR HIUS597: COLD WAR

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On January 24, 1961, a hydrogen bomb detonated a few miles north of Goldsboro, North Carolina. Not only did it wipe out most of eastern North Carolina, but the radiation traveled up the eastern seaboard crippling the U.S. economy and government.<sup>1</sup> In response to this nuclear attack, the United States and Soviet Union carried out their strategic policies of Mutually Assured Destruction leaving large land masses in both nations unusable.<sup>2</sup> While this catastrophe thankfully did not occur, there was potential for a serious nuclear detonation after a B-52G bomber crashed in rural Wayne County just north of Goldsboro on January 24, 1961. The B-52G carried two hydrogen bombs with more potential for destruction than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>3</sup> Although there was not a detonation, the public could easily perceive danger and feel threatened from a potential disaster if they were aware of the entire scope of the accident.

During the height of the Cold War, a nuclear accident would easily invoke fear in the hearts and minds of the American people. In an attempt to lessen the potential for unrest, many of the news reports of the Goldsboro accident, although mostly truthful, included misleading information to ease the fears of the public. This misleading information included downplaying the risk of radioactivity in the area of the accident site and the state of armament of the nuclear bombs that fell from the jet. Not only were there misleading news reports, but both state and federal, officials declined to issue any statements on the accident. By observing local, state, and national reaction, specifically through government statements and newspaper articles, to the B-52G crash in Goldsboro, it is easy to identify the intended public perception of the accident.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Schlosser, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2013), 247.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Dobson, *The Goldsboro Broken Arrow: The B-52 Crash of January 24, 1961*, (Greensboro, NC: J. Dobson, 2011), 243.

<sup>3</sup> Sharon Keith, "The Man Who Saved the World," *Orange County Register*, (December 30, 2012).