

**Volume 3**

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## **Surplus Wars - II**

**Lead: Faced with mountains of surplus war matériel after World War II, the U.S. government had to figure a way to get rid of the stuff.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Everything from toothpaste to fully-equipped Sherman tanks lay in storage depots from Germany to remote islands in the South Pacific. Of first concern to the American public was to get the boys home. Politicians and leaders were under constant pressure to demobilize**

**the troops, and at first little thought was given to the millions of tons of supplies with which the war had been won. In the rush to feed, house, clothe, and arm 15 million active duty personnel, few plans had been laid to dispose of the matériel they had used in the fight.**

**The first solution was to dispose of tons of supplies by destruction. Barges of island surplus were towed out to sea and sunk. Thousands of vehicles were bulldozed into the ground. P-51 Mustangs were tossed over a ravine on Okinawa because visiting brass might ask questions. Yet the mountains of surplus were so immense that even this creative disposal was not able to handle it all. The State Department**

**sold entire bases including buildings and the fixtures inside, to friendly governments.**

**At home the principal agency in charge of surplus sales was the War Assets Administration, WAA. Its energetic chief, Maj. General Robert Littlejohn hammered away at an inventory worth \$34 billion, which arrived in torrents and seemed only to be sold in dribbles.**

**Surplus airplanes were sold for scrap and ended life as razor blades. They were bought as service stations and diners along the roads of America. Barrage balloons were cut into pup tents and raincoats. Bureaucrats had to figure out ways of getting rid of**

**wagon parts left over from the Mexican War which ended in the 1840s. And what do you do with a gas mask made for a horse?**

**Gradually the mountain moved and the war against surplus was won. So thorough was the re-distribution that during the Korean War, the Defense Department had to go back to its suppliers and pay top dollar for equipment which just a few years before it had practically given away.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

**Chiles, James R., "How the Great War on Surplus Got Won, or Lost," *Smithsonian* 26 (9, December 1995): 52-64.**