

“Army Surplus”

By Lex Shuler

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When it's back to school time, I am reminded of my own school days. It was a lot simpler then – a pencil or two and a tablet made of pulp paper was about all you needed to get ready for school. Mom would have already made a couple of flannel shirts so we were ready for anything. One year school started and everyone, all twelve of us, gathered at the one room school we attended and were ready for the new school year.

After early morning classes, it was recess time and we all ran outside to play games like Anne Over, Dodge Ball, and Red Rover. We settled on Red Rover right away. Now, if you are the unenlightened, here is how Red Rover is played. We split up and formed two teams and formed two lines about twenty yards apart. Each side held hands as if to form an unbreakable barrier and then one side would yell “Red Rover, Red Rover, let Raymond come over”. Then Raymond would run as fast as he could toward the opposing line and select the weakest point to try and break through their line. The opposing line would brace themselves for the oncoming attack. If Raymond was unsuccessful he stayed with the opposing members to take back to his side. The game is over when all parties involved ended up on one side or the other and that side is the winner.

It was time for the game to start – we called “Red Rover, Red Rover, let Curtis come over”, and then it happened. Curtis Smith pulled an Army Air Corps leather pilot headgear from his back pocket, put it on, buckled the chin strap, and lowered the goggles. Here he came charging toward us, running faster than we had ever seen anyone run. He hit our line and knocked about half of us down and left with one of our strongest players. We were dumbfounded. It was like he was invincible. We wanted him on our so we called him back again and again, with his seemingly magic army surplus headgear. He was like a tank, rolling us on the ground every time he attacked our line.

Recess was over and we were all buzzing about Curtis's magic helmet as we returned to the school house.

The following week, almost every week, almost every kid, even some of the girls, visited the local army surplus store on Main Street and came to school with magic helmets of their own. They worked too. I could put on that helmet, buckle the chinstrap, lower the goggles and was absolutely sure it doubled my running speed. I could even jump further! It was truly amazing.

After that we were frequent customers of the surplus store. We saved up for other stuff that we used on weekends and during the summer. All of it seemed to have some of those magical powers. No wonder our soldiers won the war. I wish I had that old helmet today. I could really use it.