

Don Lancaster's

# RESOURCE BIN

number eighty one

## New secrets of military surplus (part I).

Our usual reminder here that the *Resource Bin* is now a two-way column. You can get tech help, consultant referrals and off-the-wall networking on nearly any electronic, *tinaja questing*, personal publishing, money machine, or computer topic by calling me at (520) 428-4073 weekdays 8-5 Mountain Standard Time.

I'm now in the process of setting up my new *Guru's Lair* web site you'll find at (where else?) [www.tinaja.com](http://www.tinaja.com) This is the place you'll go for instant tech answers. Among the many files in our library, you will find complete reprint sets for all of the *Resource Bin* and other columns. Plus a brand new [Research InfoPack Service](#).

You will get the best results if you have both [Netscape Communicator](#) and [Acrobat Reader 3.0](#) installed.

### Secrets of Mil Surplus

Something around \$687.54 worth of US military surplus will get sold *each second*. Day in and day out. At prices which average well under one penny per dollar of initial acquisition costs. Everything from superb commercial electronic test equipment thru aerobic exercise gear to live horses.

See [www.tinaja.com/bargte01.html](http://www.tinaja.com/bargte01.html) for typical examples.

A few major changes have recently happened that can make bidding and participating in military surplus sales ridiculously simpler and much easier than it once was. You can now handle nearly everything on the web and pay by VISA. Sometimes the goodies are even delivered right to your door.

On the other hand, at least one of their new bidding methods is not at all small scale or end user friendly. And around half of the DRMO outlets are scheduled to close within a very few months or so.

I've been playing around with mil surplus. So I thought I'd share some of their secret insider stuff with you.

Because your needed resource listings are unusually detailed, I will split this topic into two columns. If you just can not wait, the two files should appear at [www.tinaja.com/glib/resbn81.pdf](http://www.tinaja.com/glib/resbn81.pdf)

Your first starting point on all of this involves visiting...

<http://www.drms.com>

This url is the federal surplus home page. Both this site and their overall operation is called DRMS. Or short for *Defense Reutilization Marketing Service*. Their individual base stores are called DRMO's. Brief for *Defense Reutilization Marketing Offices*.

Your first thing to do is to click on *Public Sales* and then go to *Catalogs*, followed by *Listed by DRMS/DRMO Location*. This should give you a quick picture of just what is being offered where. Next, you use the list and your own knowledge and the addresses in our resource sidebars to pin down the bases you can easily travel to; those bases that you can possibly get to; and those bases your cousin in Omaha or a business associate can reach.

Every DRMO site is not necessarily having a sale all the time. So, it pays to verify their catalog list every few days or so to see what pops up.

In my own case, those "we deliver" RCP sites plus *Huachucha*, *Tucson*, and *Luke* are fairly close by. *Kirtland* and

**NEXT MONTH: Part II of major new opportunities in mil surplus electronics.**

*Hollomon* are painful but useful. I will sometimes bid at harder-to-reach sites such as *Bliss*, *Cannon*, *Nellis*, *29 Palms*, *Barstow*, at *Fort Irwin*, or *Edwards*. But only if something exceptional is really worth making the lengthy trip will I purposely underbid by my travel and pickup expenses. Plus a tad more.

### Finding Offered Items

There are three kinds of documents you'll find associated with each sale. The *Dynamic Listing* is a rather brief summary which more or less itemizes what is offered in each lot number. The dynamic listings supposedly will become stable ten days before the bid close. But any item can be withdrawn at any time for internal reuse.

The *Official Catalog* has the brief but guaranteed description for each item or lot. Dynamic listings tend to go up earlier. The official Catalogs may miss their web posting or go up later. In these cases, you have to use a polling fax or snailmail instead.

The third type is an *Inventory Value* document you'll have to generate all by yourself. You do this by using the fine DRMS search service to dump a list of the current inventory for your target site. These sheets show you the acquisition costs for each item, the bid dates, and the condition codes.

They also give you the FSC (Federal Supply Code) number. Your first four digits of this number can give you a clue as to exactly what type of item is being offered. Note that a "browser" in class 3920 is literally a totally different animal than a class 8820 "browser".

By searching for everything in a 4-digit class, you can get a feel for the type of beast you are bidding on.

You may have to use smaller print and a landscape output to get all the columns to list properly.

Note that obvious misprints may or may not be. A "tirpod" could indeed be a useful thing to sit a video camera on. Or it could be part of the de-icing mechanism for some C-130 wing spar. While fiction and satire writers might be attracted to the "irony aluminum", I believe that this term really means aluminum scrap with hard-to-remove steel parts stuck to it.

Beware of listed "even value" costs

such as \$10 or \$50. These are probably made up fictions that may or may not represent true prices.

There are several different types of sales. Each has its unique problems and opportunities. Let's list them here in the order I find most useful...

### Local Sealed Bid Sales

These are often your best bet. They typically consist of mixed lots of old and new stuff. Like salting a heap of Tektronix 565 doghouse scopes with a single newer 465. Rather often, there are very few bidders or no bidders at all on certain items. So you might be able to name your own price. Your usual ploy is to make reasonable bids on stuff you want and token bids on anything even remotely useful.

These sales usually start off with a 26-XXXX for Eastern US sales or else a 46-XXXX for Western US. Or at least in the "twenties" or "forties".

The feds quite strongly suggest you *carefully inspect before you bid!* Which often prevents rude surprises such as ending up with poorly misdescribed trash. Or my finding out a load bank I won was ridiculously larger and far heavier than I thought it would be.

On one hand, inspection is plain old common sense. But on the other, there is no way to tell if an otherwise clean piece of test equipment has an internal problem. Even with a close look. And you can bid higher if you do not have the time and expense of a special inspection trip.

### National Sales

A *National Sale* gathers together the *listed* offerings of a dozen bases into one combined catalog. Items tend to be of better quality and are much less assorted. Prices tend to end up higher because more bidders are attracted to the sale. All the items *remain* on the supplying base. Inspection is *highly* encouraged. These sales often do start with 31-XXXX. Or other "thirties".

Back in the old days of printed and snailmail catalogs, putting everything into one listing made sense. But with online listings and a polling faxback access, I don't see the point. You have to wade through all sorts of stuff that you couldn't possibly pick up to get at one or two reachable items.

Certain items in these sales may need a signed *End User Agreement*. In which you promise not to drop ship your winnings to Saddam or Fidel. These forms usually have to be faxed or mailed each time.

### RCP Sales

These are the *Recycling Control Point* sales. They often have more detailed catalog descriptions and *they will ship to you*. Unlike regular sales, inspection is *not* permitted. These sales typically start with 01-XXXX. They are usually sorted into aircraft parts, instruments, test equipment, electronic parts and miscellaneous hardware.

There seems to be a "one size fits all" shipping charge of \$50 *added* for most items. This sort of has the effect of *raising* the minimum bid to \$60. Which is often much too high for a possibly broken single piece of older test equipment. The trick, of course, is to bid on lots that can share the \$50 among several items. Or for heavier trophies on which such a charge can end up a real bargain.

### RCP Group Sales

This one is raising quite a howl on my website and elsewhere. Because it seems so grossly unfair to individual bidders and most small scale startups. Group sales also start with 01-XXXX. Like the regular RCP sales, there are good descriptions, no inspection, and prepaid shipping.

Only this time, you have to bid on an *entire* one-bid-takes-all pile called a *group*. Which can be everything that a chosen base added to the sale. Often, there will be seven groups instead of several hundred lots.

From the feds standpoint, disposal costs are way lower, admin is a lot simpler, and there's no problems with unbid items. But the bidder now has to risk thousands or tens of thousands of dollars instead of pocket change. And you have to take all the junk to get at the goodies. Which leaves you with a "iffen yew cain't hunt with the big dogs, stay on the porch" situation.

On the other hand, the higher risks and minimums might drive down the individual item prices. Way down so far. But note that the shipping charges alone sometimes exceed \$3000.

The secret is to carefully add up the maximum you are willing to pay *only* for each item you *really* can use. Then, you internalize the shipping charges before you bid. If you end up with less value than your charges, then you obviously do not bid. Otherwise, you bid only the difference.

In a recent example, two mil worth of test equipment went for *three cents on the dollar* at \$60,000. Plus the \$3700 worth of shipping charges.

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Operation Joint Guard  
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Phone: 0036-82-426-740  
Fax: 0036-82-426-739

**DRMO Bupyong**  
Unit #15395  
APO AP 96283-0120  
Phone: 011-82-32-524-4629  
Fax: 011-82-32-520-6889

**DRMO Drum Annex**  
10th Mountain Division  
Bldg S-1350  
Ft Drum NY 13602  
Phone: 315-772-4592  
Fax: 315-772-5809

**DRMO Ft Bliss (\*)**  
1733 Pleasonton Rd  
Bldg 11126 Biggs Field  
Ft Bliss TX 79916  
Phone: 915-568-8503  
Fax: 915-568-8161

**DRMO Homestead Annex**  
29050 Coral Sea Blvd  
Homestead ARS, FL 33039  
Phone: 305-224-7300  
Fax: 305-224-7451

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Aberdeen PG MD 21005  
Phone: 410-278-2235  
Fax: 410-278-9220

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Fort Campbell KY 42223  
Phone: 502-798-3525  
Fax: 502-798-5183

**DRMO Duluth**  
4997 Airport Rd  
Duluth MN 55811-1517  
Phone: 218-723-7441  
Fax: 218-722-2611

**DRMO Gordon (\*)**  
Bldg 994  
10th Street  
Ft Gordon GA 30905  
Phone: 706-791-3749  
Fax: 706-791-8623

**DRMO Hood**  
80th Street Bldg 4289  
Tank Destroyer & 80th Street  
Ft Hood TX 76544-0210  
Phone: 254-287-7763  
Fax: 254-288-6794

**DRMO Albany (\*)**  
Bldg 1331 Dr 12 Topside  
Marine Corps Logistics  
Albany GA 31704  
Phone: 912-439-5966  
Fax: 912-439-5972

**DRMO Cannon**  
110 W Street  
Cannon AFB NM 88103  
Phone: 505-784-2436  
Fax: 505-784-2012

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Phone: 907-552-3733  
Fax: 907-552-7548

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Marine Corps Air Station  
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Phone: 919-466-2743  
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**DRMO Edwards (\*)**  
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Edwards AFB CA 93524  
Phone: 805-277-2209  
Fax: 805-277-7039

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Fax: 406-731-6560

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Phone: 205-876-2453  
Fax: 205-955-6687

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Phone: 205-235-7837  
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**DRMO Chievres, Belg**  
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7950 Chievres Belgium  
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Fax: 011-49-06-31-4617

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Fax: 850-882-4789

**DRMO Great Lakes**  
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3012 Mississippi Street  
Great Lakes, IL 60088  
Phone: 708-847-3655  
Fax: 708-847-2510

**DRMO Jackson**  
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Ft Jackson SC 29207  
Phone: 803-751-7912  
Fax: 803-751-3506

**DRMO Barstow**  
Marine Corps Logistics  
Base Bldg 226 Boll Ave  
Barstow CA 92311  
Phone: 760-577-6568  
Fax: 760-577-6526

**DRMO China Lake (\*)**  
Naval Air Weapons Station  
China Lake CA 93555  
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Fax: 760-939-0162

**DRMO EI Toro (\*)**  
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Marine Corp Air Station ET  
Santa Ana CA 92709  
Phone: 714-726-4937  
Fax: 714-726-3151

**DRMO Groton**  
NSBase New London  
Bldg 397 Box 12  
Groton CT 06349  
Phone: 860-449-3523  
Fax: 860-694-2866

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8297 Roosevelt Blvd B174  
Jacksonville FL 32212  
Phone: 904-542-3411  
Fax: 904-542-3418

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Ellsworth AFB SD 57706  
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Fax: 605-385-1615

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Fort Belvoir VA 22060  
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Fax: 703-806-5567

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3990 E Broad St  
Bldg 14  
Columbus OH 43213  
Phone: 614-692-3244  
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**DRMO F E Warren (\*)**  
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Cheyenne WY 82005  
Phone: 307-773-3970  
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**DRMO Guantanamo**  
Bldg 696B PSC 1005  
Box 33 Code 230  
FPO AE 09593  
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Fax: 0-115-399-4184

**DRMO Keflavik, Iceland**  
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PSC 1003 Box 29  
235 Keflavik Airport Iceland  
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Fax: 011-354-425-7092

**DRMO Benning**  
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10th Mountain Div Rd  
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Fax: 706-545-5125

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Corpus Christi TX 78419  
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Fax: 512-961-3203

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1/4 Mile Badger Rd  
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Phone: 907-353-7406  
Fax: 907-353-7416

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Enterprise & Midway St  
NAS Barbers Pt HI 96862  
Phone: 808-684-5980  
Fax: 808-684-6670

**DRMO Key West**  
Bldg 931  
Naval Air Station  
Key West FL 33040  
Phone: 305-293-5271  
Fax: 305-293-5274

**DRMO Bitburg, Germany**  
Unit 4025  
Bldg 1093  
54634 Bitburg Germany  
Phone: 011-49-6561-2484  
Fax: 011-49-6561-2484

**DRMO Crane**  
Naval Surface Warfare Ctr  
Bldg 300 Highway 361  
Crane IN 47522  
Phone: 812-854-1554  
Fax: 812-854-1998

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120 N Foulis Ave.  
Fairchild AFB WA 99011  
Phone: 509-247-4228  
Fax: 206-967-8375

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Bldg 890 7844 Arsenal Rd  
Hill AFB UT 84056  
Phone: 801-777-7422  
Fax: 801-777-2695

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5050 Randolph Avenueue  
Kirtland AFB NM 87117  
Phone: 505-846-6959  
Fax: 505-846-1825

**DRMO Bragg**  
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Ft Bragg NC 28307  
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Fax: 910-396-7364

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Phone: 303-289-0376  
Fax: 303-289-0523

**DRMO Forest Park (\*)**  
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Forest Park GA 30050  
Phone: 404-363-5117/5118  
Fax: 404-362-7424

**DRMO Holloman**  
241 Arkansas  
Holloman AFB NM 88330  
Phone: 505-475-3748  
Fax: 505-475-3235

**DRMO Knox**  
2962 Frazier Road  
Ft Knox KY 40121-5640  
Phone: 502-624-3244  
Fax: 502-624-7321

(\*) – Scheduled to close in the next few months.

Fully one third of the stash were HP spectrum analyzers described in "fair" condition. In other examples of much less obvious or less desirable stuff, the winning bids ended up way *under* the shipping charges.

While in the running, I have yet to hit on one of these group sales. But scoring places you in the surplus biz big time. And very conveniently.

### Other Sales

There's several other types of less popular and less useful sales. A RCP LDV or *low dollar value* sales start with 02-XXXX and works just like a group sale. There is *one* winner-takes-all bid for a whole truck or two full of junk. Typically two-thirds aircraft parts and one-third electronic pieces. Maybe 1500 items in mixed quantities. Mostly new. These would be more useful if they split the electrics out.

The *international* sales are normally held at places that you cannot get to. Driving to Guam or the Azores can be a real drowner. International sales may start with 50-XXXX.

Special sales are put on for larger boats (destroyers go for \$200K), for general scrap (used cooking grease seems fairly popular) or for classified electronic scrap where you'll have to give proof of strict security controls before you are allowed to bid.

Some DRMO sites also offer a retail store where the stuff is sitting around with marked prices. Desks and filing cabinets are often popular here. Their hours tend to be short and unusual, so call before attending.

Live auctions are also rarely held.

### Condition Codes

The feds try to indicate the quality of each item by using *condition codes*. One obvious set of codes runs *unused, good, fair, poor, residue, and scrap*.

Their fancier set consists of a letter followed by a number. A1 means new and perfect. A4 implies like new. F7 means probably easily repairable F8 means probably *not* easily repairable. H7 means pretty bad. HX means scrap plus hazardous materials that may be illegal to dispose of.

Most "F" test equipment does not include manuals, probes, and some plugins. We looked at finding older test equipment manuals last month back in [RESBN80.PDF](#)

Additional details of these specific meanings is shown on their website. The bottom line: Use caution with any "F" item and extreme caution with any "H". Unless you token bid. Even then, the pickup and triage expenses may not be worth the hassle.

But a stack of identical bad items can often be rebuilt into a smaller pile of good ones. Provided they all failed in different ways.

### Efficient Markets

An economist defines an *efficient market* in which there are lots of very smart buyers that force a "fair" price. With rather few exceptions, most mil surplus does not come even remotely close. As much as *one third* or so of the items will have no bidders at all. Or at most, only a single bidder. Whose bid price was obviously too high. Certain older specialized electronics may go

for tenths of a cent on the dollar.

Older electronics does tend to be uselessly bulky and heavy. And may have zero market, except as scrap.

Some popular items do get bid up to respectable prices, though. Most of the "army-navy store" items go for ten or twenty percent of cost. Modern Tek scopes "A4" and by themselves might hit twenty percent, while a like-new HP Spectrum analyzer might go for thirty-five. A few high demand lathes and milling machines may actually go for 300% of mil cost. Owing to some recent dramatic price increases.

The vacuum tube nuts have been having a feeding frenzy lately. Seems your feds have of late been dumping mountains of tubes. Perhaps 80,000 of one number at a whack. Some of these are actually going for 130 percent of original cost!

*(To be continued next month)*

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*Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless tech articles. Don maintains his no-charge US tech helpline found at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all of his own books, reprints, and consulting services. Don also offers a free catalog full of his unique products and resource secrets. The best calling times are 8-5 on weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.*

*Don is the webmaster of his Guru's Lair found at <http://www.tinaja.com>*

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