

Don Lancaster's

RESOURCE BIN

number eighty two

New secrets of military surplus (part II).

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 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.

Uh, Where Were We?

Last month, we started to look into superb new opportunities in military surplus electronics. We saw that your key website is www.drms.com and that you can now bid online and pay with VISA. We also looked at the types of sales, condition codes, and the typical prices you might expect. More details at www.tinaja.com/resbn01.html

Continuing...

Winners and Losers

How could you find out who paid how much for what? Those national sales and their RCP sale results are detailed on their main website. They even show you how much the losers bid, the number of bidders, the cost percentage, and their spread between high and low bids for any item. It is rare for there to be more than four or so bidders. Except for a few obviously popular items.

Local sealed bid sale results are not yet on the web. Although they were promised someday. You can get these on an item-by-item basis with a phone

call, by viewing printouts on the base, or by paying \$5 for their printed and mailed listings.

Do note that there are two sets of national web listings. The *bid abstracts* is "raw data" that gives you a full list of all the bidders for any item, along with the total percentage return. The *bid results* gives you only their actual winners. Along with items that were withdrawn, unbid, or rejected.

Their abstracts and results are not necessarily on line at the same time. So you just might have to save certain abstracts of interest. Files more than two weeks old get dropped.

How much to bid? Chances are that six cents on the dollar will more than get your gem for you. Unless it's very popular and in mint condition. But I prefer to bid much lower and wait till it comes around again. Unlike most regular auctions, the sale never ends. If you hit every time, you are paying way too much.

There's a near infinite supply of this stuff. Round and round.

The "Never be Underbid" Ploy

There's at least one company with an unusual surplus bidding strategy. They always seem to make absolutely certain they are the *lowest* bidder on

NEXT MONTH: Don looks at some exciting new integrated circuits.

any item. Every time. As a matter of professional pride, they'll make sure they are *never* underbid.

Naturally, they are also the lowest bid on items that nobody else bid on. Otherwise known as the winner. As you might suspect, their hit rate ends up kinda low. I estimate it at a few percent overall. But they still seem to get great heaping mountains of stuff.

Just by bidding on nearly everything that does not eat.

The results would seem rather akin to the "send your wife to the top name on the list" chain letter. Where sheer quantity would take precedence over quality. But a few absolute gems are virtually certain.

For this low bid ploy to work, you will have to continuously run around the country in a large truck. You also must have a very definite storage and disposal plan.

Plus a good feel for what you can get away with.

The feds often do require minimum bids (typically \$5 or \$10) on the local auctions. So do be sure to ask. Other minimums (such as \$2400 for a RR boxcar) are carefully spelled out. As far as I know, rejecting a high token bid on a local sale is very rare.

But on national sales, the feds do reserve their right to throw out any bids that "unfairly take advantage" of either themselves or another bidder. The criteria for an "insufficient price" rejection seems sorta bizarre.

Apparently the cost percentage, the number of *other* token bidders, former item bids, and how bad it makes the rest of the sale look all get taken into account. There is some evidence that anything under twenty-five cents per thousand dollars acquisition cost of high value items usually gets rejected outright. But two dollar per thousand awards on lower demand items seem routinely accepted.

Accepted low price bids seem less generous on obvious values such as machine tools or aircraft parts.

On the other hand, I have seen the feds reject bids which were ten times higher what a sane individual would spend for core memory or paper tape punches. Old electronics often has a *negative* value. The rejected bids are shown on the bid result pages.

The message here is that *token bids*

work. So long as your items are either not much in demand, hard to get to, need heavy rework, or are obscurely described. And so long as the market remains erratic rather than efficient. The trap to watch out for is hitting on only one token bid at a site that is a long or inconvenient trip away.

Needless to say, your feds do not take lightly to "no show" bids. They get even more upset if you stiff them on a VISA card. And if you don't pick up your stuff by "pumpkin time", you can loose all rights to it.

Even if paid for.

Normal pickup interval is ten days. They tend to get very upset if you try for even a slight extension.

The Bidding Process

A useful surplus strategy might be based on buying for a penny on the dollar, selling for a dime, and trying to make a nine percent profit in the process. But note that there is a total glut in the electronic test equipment market. Lean and mean is your *only* play that works. So, your best bet is to buy surplus to build up a dream lab.

Or for other personal uses.

It is best to take your time about the process. I grab the dynamic listing as soon as it comes up and throw it in a time-ordered box. I then try to find out what each item is along with its acquisition cost. The official catalog is finally added, and bid prices are then worried over for one week before the actual bid. I do try to bid a day or two before the deadline. Note that their fax machines tend to jam up near the bid closing time.

Most of the bidding can be done online. Simply use mouse clicks and follow the instructions. If an end user certificate will be needed (this is fairly rare), then it is best sent via fax at the time your bid is accepted.

Winners *only* are usually notified with a phone call, followed by fax and mail. Payment is easiest as VISA over fax. At DRMO, VISA, certified checks, or *exact* cash. Personal checks above \$25 are not allowed.

Payment must, of course, precede any pickup.

Getting the Goods

Getting on a military base can be somewhat of a hassle. But the process usually will go something like this: Somewhere near the main gate will be a visitor contact area. You'll go there and show them your driver's licence, registration, your rental contract (if

any) and proof-of-insurance. They'll issue you a *day pass* for you.

Patience and extreme politeness are essential. So is a reasonable demeanor. Those "mad bomber", "dirty hippy" or "flamingly accessorized" looks don't seem to set all that well. It is also very important to pay *extreme* attention to *all* details. Every time.

Access ease depends upon the base. Huachucha opts for the full drill. D-M Tucson just waves you through. And Luke's DRMO is outside the gate.

The DRMO will often be a fenced area in an obscure corner of the base. Be certain to listen to *all* directions. Otherwise, you may get run over by a tank. You should park outside the DRMO office and then make contact with them. They then should tell you exactly where to go for pickup.

Banker's hours seem the DRMO norm. Weekdays only with most sites closed by two PM. Er, 1400.

The feds will help you load to your *open conveyence only*. Whatever they can safely do with a forklift. *No other loading help is normally provided.*

If you have someone else pick up your stuff for you, you are supposed to prefile an authorized shipper form to the DRMO ahead of time. But so far, I've gotten away with the loader having a carefully detailed printout of an authorization email. Or faxing a suitable sheet of paper.

Remember, it is their gig. They can make up any rules they like.

\$24 Jeeps?

One of the most persistent urban lore myths of all time is the \$24 Jeep. Surprisingly, it turns out that these WW II derelicts have (and extremely rarely continue) to be sold. The only little kicker is that these are not street legal. So they always are carefully *cut in half* before each sale.

These make great bookends if you have a big enough library.

It does turn out that at least one Yuppy direct mail reseller has newly been buying these up and dropping usable parts into new frames and then upgrading them to street legal. The final cost is high enough, though, that you would really want to have one of these real bad. You can find a much better Jeep in a local shopper.

The feds have a big time recycling program on Humvees, so these are virtually *never* sold surplus.

Humvees, of course, are the most laughingly useless and outrageously overpriced vehicle ever scammed. No

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

sane private individual keeps one of these for more than the few weeks it takes to find a greater fool. But nearly everybody wants to ride in one.

Once.

Lots of street legal trucks and other military vehicles do get sold surplus. Many of these tend to be badly worn or have other serious problems. For some obscure reason, a lot of these ride like an army truck. Very careful inspection is the key. Be especially wary of that word "residue". Also if an "approximate quantity one" ever shows up in the description. Bidding tends to end up rather competitive on these, and they often may go for way more than they are really worth.

Free Surplus?

Most of the stuff on the sales is also available *free*. If you are a part of a military, government, state, or local agency. Your local city government could, say, request camping gear for sponsored Boy Scout use. Or athletic items for the city park. Or an indian res can (and recently did) get a horse. Or a struggling volunteer fire group could try and score used turnout gear, tankers, and even crash trucks.

These uses take precedence over public sales. Full details appear on the "insider" half of the fed's mil surplus website. Needless to say, if you try to personally profit from any such scam, they will stake you to an anthill. And leave you there till the next meeting of the steering committee.

Your secret is to scan the fed's raw

inventory property search to find the stuff *before* they get locked into any specific public sale. There are a lot of bureaucratic hassles involved.

For More Help

Your usual starting point here is at <http://www.drms.com> Everything you need is theoretically on this site. Note the ".com". *Not* ".gov" or ".mil" But it does take some digging and practice to get to all the really useful stuff.

One thing you might consider is to find an *agent*. A relative or friend or whoever which just happens to live across the street from a remote DRMO office. Having them preview, pick up, triage, and stash the stuff can greatly simplify the process.

Conversely, when you are properly positioned and want to be an agent (for a reasonable fee or part of the stash), give me a call or email me at don@tinaja.com I particularly could use Barstow and Edwards help.

My resource sidebars here give you the address, phone, and fax number for most of the DRMO offices. Those with an asterisk are on a hit list and have received serious death threats.

You can get your own online copies at www.tinaja.com/resbn01.html

Lots of samples of gotten goodies at www.tinaja.com/bargte01.html The best stuff here includes Tek 2213 scopes, giant HP pen plotters, great ac motors, complete and like-new printed circuit plate thru labs, lots of Tek, HP, and Fluke premium gear, and, (yup - you guessed it) a humongous 50 KW load

bank. The latter FOB Thatcher.

I'll be happy to answer mil surplus questions as per our helpline below. And more structured help is found at my www.tinaja.com/info01.html

This Month's Contest

For our contest this month, just tell me your mil surplus story. Preferably as a tragedy or farce.

There should be a largish pile of my new *Incredible Secret Money Machine III* books going to the dozen or so better entries, plus an all-expense-paid (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja quest* for two that will go to the very best of all.

To be fair to everyone, all entries must get written and submitted via snailmail. Send all your *written* entries to me here at *Synergetics*, rather than to *Nuts & Volts* editorial.

Let's hear from you. ♦

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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