

To what degree was West End Ladies Outfitters affected by the war?

It was boarded up. All the windows in all the shops were boarded up and then there were flaps that you used to open up during the day.

I was wondering whether possibly you had to supply materials for services at all?

No. In those days we were issued with coupons and therefore everything we sold had to be exchange coupons. Blouses were so many coupons; a frock was so many coupons, all this sort of thing. I mean the same as the food rationing, was also coupons. And when we bought stuff, we had to supply coupons. A little incident that happened, these white Georgette blouses. The Georgette was hard to [come by]. One of the big firms in Melbourne, Richard Allan's, were a very big firm and they used to supply us; they were one of our main suppliers. They were very good to my mother and aunt because they were two young girls and my aunty used to play poker. And she wasn't a very good poker player, I can tell you. But she – Keith Allan who was one of the younger ones from Richard Allan's, wired my aunt a hundred pieces of Georgette limit. So my aunt wired him back 'limit again'. And she got her two hundred pieces of Georgette. But there was about thirty yards on a piece, so you can imagine how much Georgette we were getting. But this is just one of the little side bits because when Keith came over here, he used to play poker with my aunt.

How did the supplies of materials become affected by the war, in relation to some of your stockists, for instance?

Very short. And whatever we bought we had to have coupons.

Tell us about what Christmas was like in Perth, before and during the war.

During the war it wasn't very much that I can remember. There was – the Americans were here from '41 and they had a big base in Crawley and they were, their headquarters were in the old CML [Colonial Mutual Life Building], they took over most of that. And of course they had all of their – they would come down here they had nurses from the hospital and the flying boats were in Crawley, they were all in that area there, down in Crawley were all the boats. But the Americans were everywhere.

How did they liven up the place?

There used to be lots of fights amongst the Australians and the Americans, as you can imagine (laughs). But no in some places they were well received in other places they weren't but I had friends there and I knew some of the nurses. Two or three of my friends were drivers, women drivers, and they used to drive the Americans around. And I was very fortunate because now and then I'd get a box of chocolates or some candies or things like that that they were given. I remember once, one of the drivers, she said that one of the young boys he was having a birthday, would I make him a cake. Well I had just learnt fancy icing, icing a cake. So I made him a cake and decorated it with the American flag on it because I had just learnt how to do that special icing. And I did quite well out of that I got a lovely big box of candies.

PEARLMAN

What sort of reputation did the American soldiers have?

Some were good and some were bad, about the same as anywhere. I mean to say even in the paper today there's a fellow in the Philippines - - -. It's the same sort of thing. And the American police they used to go around in pairs watching so that there wasn't too much trouble.

As I understand, they were fairly well dressed.

Always well dressed.

Can you tell us.

Well, in their uniforms. If they were in civvy clothes, they didn't look any different to us anyway, so we didn't know. But they were always in uniform, they were always well dressed.