

The United States in War and Peace

A Regular Column by Shelby L. Stanton

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Limitation Order L-85: General Restrictions

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During World War II the U.S. War Production Board (WPB) was responsible for insuring that certain critical fabrics and materials – to include nylon, rubber, silk, leather and wool – were reserved exclusively for combat or combat support purposes. These military priorities caused WPB to enact Limitation Order L-85 (see 2009 May II column) imposing material restrictions on the design and manufacture of feminine apparel. Parts of the actual text of this order are reproduced here as follows:

“(e) General Restrictions on the Manufacture and Sale of All Articles of Feminine Apparel. Except as otherwise herein expressly provided, no person shall, after the effective date of this Order with respect to such person, put into process any cloth for the manufacture of, or sell or deliver any feminine apparel with:

- (1) more than two articles of apparel at one unit price, except when specific restriction herein has limited the sale of any article of apparel to one unit at one unit price.**
- (2) any garment of multiple units, any of which contain wool cloth to be sold at a unit price, if they were not in jobbers or retailers stock at the time this Order became effective on the manufacture of such garments made of wool cloth.**
- (3) French cuffs on sleeves.**
- (4) double material yokes.**
- (5) balloon, dolman, or leg-of-mutton sleeves.**
- (6) fabrics which have been reduced from normal width or length by allover**

tucking, shirring, or pleating, except for minor trimmings.

(7) inside pockets of wool cloth.

(8) patch pockets of wool cloth on a lined wool cloth garment.

(9) interlinings containing any virgin or reprocessed wool.”

Captions



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Regulations for the American clothing industry were established by U.S. War Production Board Limitation Order L-85. Two models exhibit the same basic dress. However, the one on the left has eliminated extra pleating above the hem and saved one-half yard of 39-inch material over the unsatisfactory version shown at the right, marked by a white "X" in the photograph.

(Collection Shelby Stanton)

The original fashion sketch at the upper left was not allowed under U.S. War Production Board Order Limitation Order L-85 because 1,400 square inches of trimming was required. However, the final dress photographed on the left, as well as the alternative sketches, conformed to the order by saving more than half the material used for trimming (from top to bottom, using 364, 650, 240 and 320 square inches).

(Collection Shelby Stanton)



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Under the general provisions of U.S. War Production Board Limitation Order L-85, the dress



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in the upper left used a prohibited amount of material. This dress was altered in conformity with WPB dictates by eliminating the bows at the cuffs, shortening the sleeves to elbow length, simplifying the trimming and reducing the “sweep” or fullness of width around the dress bottom. The final satisfactory version is shown on the right.

(Collection Shelby Stanton)

The difference between these two blouses may appear slight. However, the pleating of the garment on the right used eight inches of fabric and is marked with an “X” to show nonconformity to U.S. War Production Board Limitation Order L-85 standards. The blouse at the upper left conforms to WPB mandates by tucking half the amount, or only four inches, of material into the pleats.

(Collection Shelby Stanton)



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Note: The next few columns will be devoted to a detailed survey of Limitation Order L-85 and wartime feminine dress, along with illustrative examples. My information for this column is based on personal research in U.S. National Archives Record Group 179.2.

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