

# WORLD WAR II

## THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO EXPERIENCE

### WOMEN IN THE WAR



These are A.T.S. Clerks who work in the Storeroom of the Trinidad Base Command.

The landscape of women's work had been changed dramatically during the Second World War in occupied Trinidad and Tobago. Many women from the upper and middle classes joined the uniformed services open to females, namely the Women's Voluntary Services and the Auxiliary Territorial Services. Some of the women from the upper echelon of society also founded and ran a multitude of organisations in which volunteers worked towards the war effort.

Additionally they:

1. Helped to nurse and care for wounded or ill servicemen.
2. Established and ran canteens for foreign troops.
3. Helped to entertain them with concerts, teas and parties.
4. Drove vehicles for military purposes.
5. Worked in the censorship service (incoming and outgoing letters to Trinidad were read and censored in case they contained sensitive military information).
6. Knitted and sewed innumerable garments for troops and prisoners of war abroad and took up clerical and other posts at the British and American bases and headquarters.

However, there was also an alternative dimension to women's work in this period which was conceptualized in Lord Invader's, "Rum and Coca Cola",

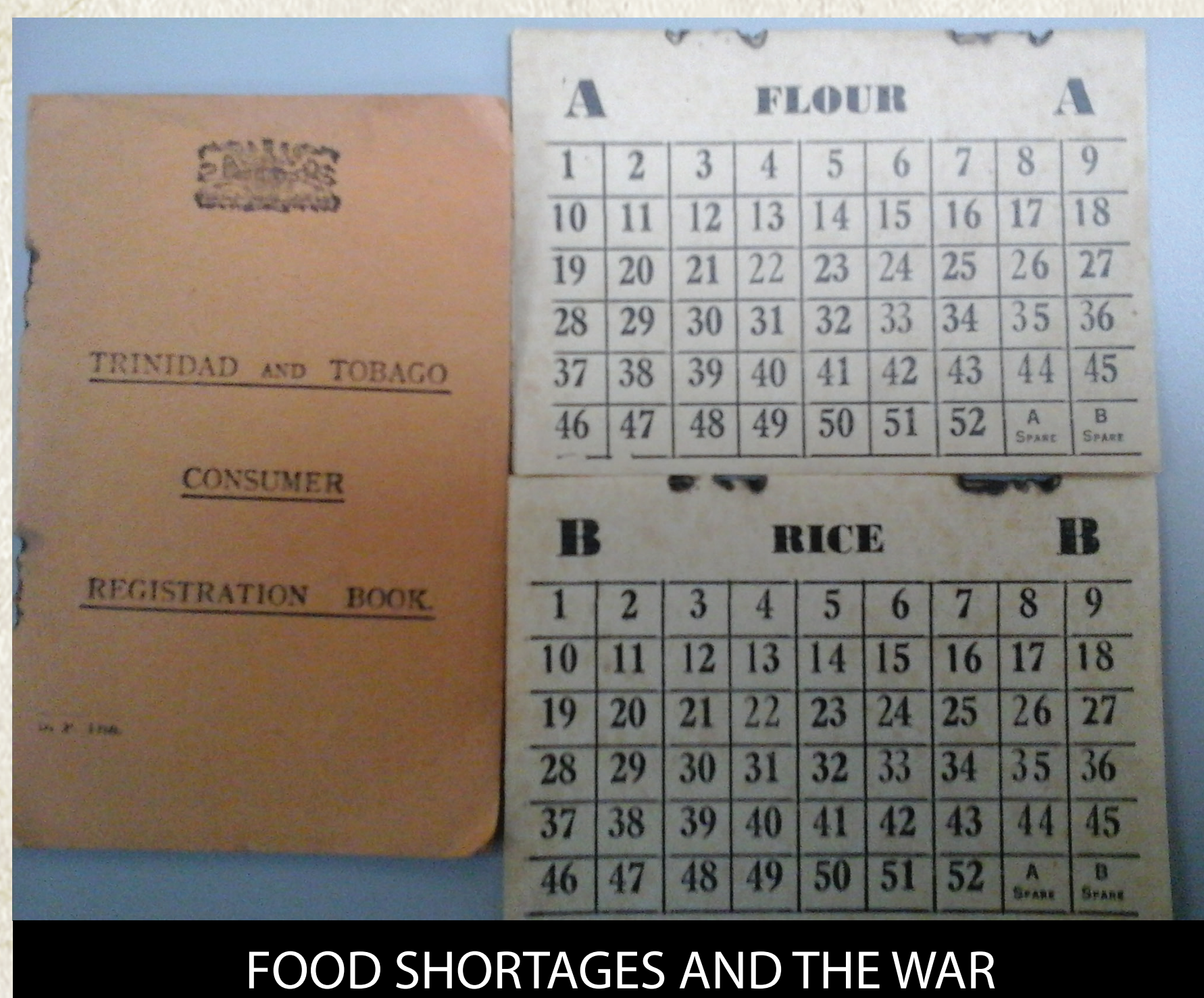
*And when de Yankeys first went to  
Trinidad, Some ah de young girls  
Were more than glad,  
Deh said that de Yankeys treat dem  
Nice and deh give dem the better  
Price.*

This calypso captured the idea that women's main "contribution" was to provide sexual services to American soldiers and sailors. This also highlighted the absence of cash flow in households due to economic hardships of the war. This did not mean that there was no prostitution existing in Trinidad prior to the war, but it was the catalyst for it becoming more prominent especially near the two main U.S. bases stationed in Chaguaramas and Waller field.

Brereton, Bridget. "Women in Wartime." Trinidad Express Newspapers [Port of Spain] 20 Nov. 2013: n. pag. Print.

Rohlehr, Gordon. Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad. Kingston: The University of West Indies Press, 1990. Print.

### FOOD SHORTAGES AND THE WAR



FOOD SHORTAGES AND THE WAR

One of the consequences of World War II experienced by Trinidad and Tobago was food shortages. With the disruption of the importation of food from the United States, proposals for food rations were implemented. The Growling Tiger in his 1942 calypso, "Let Them Fight for a Thousand Years" emphasised the growing problem of food shortage as he stated:

*Before the war I was living nice  
Hot potato with me bacon, stew pork and rice  
Toast bread with butter and jam  
Seven eggs in the morning with junk o' ham  
Today ah living like a wandering bird  
If a see a pot for seconds ah can't find me food  
Ah living by guess. Oh have sympathy!  
Since the war declare with England and Germany*

According to the Ecclesville Agricultural Society, "children and adults are starving in the country on account of the scarcity of the basic foods as rice and flour." It was proposed that the government's attention be drawn to the plight of the people and compulsory rationing be introduced to secure

equitable food distribution. Sybil Gibbs, reflecting on her life during colonialism and the Second World War, laments that "there were food shortages of imported staple goods of flour and rice in Trinidad and Tobago." In order to accommodate the population, each family was allowed to purchase a weekly quota or ration of rice and flour. To keep track of this weekly quota 'Ration Cards' were produced. The dynamics upon which the card operated was that when weekly rations of flour and rice were purchased at the shops, the consumer gave the card to the shopkeeper who placed an X in the boxes on the ration cards for each item bought.

Gibbs, Sybil. A Child of Colonialism and World War II: My Memories. I Universe, 2002. Web.

Rohlehr, Gordon. Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad. Kingston: The University of West Indies Press, 1990. Print.