

Kiwi Outdoors Centre

New name sets the tone for the 90s

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A Daily News Advertising Feature



FAMILY: From left, Allen, Max and Gary Pool. Photo: GLEN FERGUSSON



FAMILIAR: The rustic look of the store's interior.

Photo: GLEN FERGUSSON

Army gear was popular

ALLEN POOL's grandfather, John Pool, opened the Army Stores in New Plymouth in 1937.

The city had appealed to him on an earlier visit and he made the move from Masterton with his son Max to open a store here. He left his brother operating an Army Stores operation there, a store still owned by other family members.

New Plymouth trading was carried out from several locations around the city until 1941 when he bought the Ariki St store, then a second-hand store and lending library.

Following World War II he moved into clothes in a big way, buying his stock from army surplus auctions. Over the years, thousands of Taranaki farmers, workers and residents bought and owned the khaki jackets and trousers.

"Farmers dressed in the best-selling shearing trousers in New Zealand," said Allen Pool, John's grandson and co-proprietor with his father of today's store.

"Every boy on a paper run or milk round wore an army jacket," he said. "Even through the fifties, sixties and seventies they were still popular."

A huge sale of surplus army clothing was held in the late 1950s when the army changed from the khaki uniforms to jungle green. Seven of the privately owned Army Stores businesses around the North Island joined in bidding for the 49,000 uniforms. They bought the entire stock.

Allen Pool recalled another auction early in the 1960s in which his father bid sixpence (5c) each for a large number of cases of army shirts. The auctioneer had opened one case to see how worn the surplus clothing was.

As the condition of the sample shirt was worn but reasonable, he said he would not accept less

than ninepence (8c). That was agreed and Max Pool took away the stock to his shop. Upon opening the other cases he found them filled, not with the used clothing he expected, but new shirts. That was a windfall for the store.

In the 1950s the Army Stores diversified into new working clothes, adding to the army surplus gear, tents, tarpaulins and saddlery it had sold until then.

"We'd always sold sleeping bags and tents but working clothes were the bulk of our business," Allen Pool said.

In the last few years, the store had diversified even further as chain stores and other retailers encroached on its traditional business. The Army Stores began specialising in tramping equipment and adventure clothing, a trend which has brought it to the name change launched this week.

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