

PART FOUR

Chapter Seven

Group Settlements in Australia and Overseas

Chapters Five and Six, 'Hope' and 'Despair', revealed men on the group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland believed initially they could succeed at small-scale farming. They knew they had few options open to them to earn a living post-war, affected physically or psychologically by their war experiences. The opportunity to own a home and land, be self-sufficient and recover their health working in the open air had great appeal. This study has revealed however, that the social experiment of group settlement, at least those close to Sydney, soon became unsuccessful.

Earlier chapters have described the reasons why the New South Wales government, under Labor Premier Holman, decided to heavily promote group soldier settlement in this state, believing it was not only advantageous for inexperienced ex-servicemen but possible failures would be minimised because of on-site supervision. It was argued the state would benefit because this policy allowed for large numbers of men to be placed quickly on the land in order to meet their obligation to settle in excess of 8,000 men, and provided a workable solution to New South Wales' lack of available Crown lands for agricultural use. It has also been shown in this thesis that this land policy was not innovative, with similar ventures only a generation earlier across Australia having largely failed.

However, group soldier settlement was not unique to New South Wales. Group soldier settlement was also implemented in some parts of Australia and in other countries. How these settlements fared will be investigated in this chapter, expanding on the results from soldier settlements across Australia, focusing on group settlements, as well as providing an overview of group settlements established in other parts of the English-speaking world.

In Victoria in September 1916, the state Poultry Expert recommended that the government establish communal or group poultry soldier settlements, arguing that this would allow for ‘a guiding hand’ by managers to teach returned men best farming practices.¹ Nine months later he had changed his mind, saying costs had escalated so that the former proposal was judged to be uneconomic. In addition, the Poultry Expert said he had advised at least 120 returned men not to enter the industry.² The Victorian Poultry Expert’s professional opinion was that group poultry soldier settlement was not viable, diametrically opposed to the situation in New South Wales where Bankstown settlement was already under development. No mention is made throughout the report to Victorian authorities of the physical or mental health of returned men advised against poultry farming, although all had been medically discharged during the war.

Similarly, less than a year after the Poultry Expert’s advice, Norman Bell Jackson wrote to the Victorian State War Council suggesting communal soldier settlement

¹ National Archives of Australia: Repatriation Department; A2481, *Correspondence files, annual single number system with ‘A’ prefix (mainly relating to the administration of repatriation schemes)*, 16 December 1917- 14 January 1919, A1918/82 Re poultry farming and fruit growing, Report to Victorian State War Council by H.V. Hawkins, poultry expert noting previous report of 4 September 1916.

² *ibid.*, report 25 July 1917.

with men working under an experienced manager was a practical working solution for settling men on the land. His proposed model based around a community area which included parks, schools and shops, was rejected.³ In reply he was informed that the proposal contained nothing new and several states had already considered a similar policy, with one or two 'experimenting with group settlements'.⁴

Although Jackson's suggestion was rejected it is obvious authorities in other states followed the progress of group settlements in New South Wales perhaps with a view to introduce a similar program if it showed signs of success. The Victorian Minister for Lands Mr Clarke visited a poultry group settlement in Sydney in April 1919. The un-named settlement, most probably Bankstown, was eighteen months old and was still not self-supporting. The Minister commented that he was concerned at the large debts settlers had, and questioned whether they would ever make enough money to make any repayments, let alone an income for themselves. Comparing both states' schemes for settling returned men on the land, Mr Clarke said that 'though his system made my mouth water, it depends too much upon the Minister's judgement of land to make me wish to copy it. Our own method may be slower, but it is much safer'.⁵

Victoria had virtually no soldier settlers who were poultry farmers, obviously following the earlier advice of the Poultry Expert.⁶

The 1925 Victorian report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement noted that the government had bowed to public pressure during and immediately after the war as

³ *ibid.*, A1918/860, Communal land settlement for returned soldiers – Norman Bell Jackson. Letter from Jackson, an employee of the War Council, 19 March 1918.

⁴ *ibid.*, reply from Department of Repatriation, dated 22 March 1918.

⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 1919, p. 7, 'Soldiers' Poultry Farms. Criticism of N.S.W. Settlement'.

⁶ State Records of New South Wales: *Department of Lands, Returned Soldier Settlement Miscellaneous Files*, NRS 8056 [19/7028] contains cutting from *The Age* 24 April 1919, no page number.

‘the cry was that every soldier should get a chance if he desired to go on the land, especially if he were suffering from war injuries, it being supposed that his health would benefit by living in the country’.⁷ It said a small portion of settlers who had forfeited were ‘weak men and were doing no good’, but noted many settlers suffered from war disabilities which developed after they had been working their land for some time.⁸ The Minority Report submitted at the same time was more decisive, saying a large percentage of soldier settlers suffered from war-related disabilities recommending more lenient terms be introduced.⁹

Despite Victoria’s wariness of group settlement, it was taken up in other states. As noted in Chapter One, Johnson’s research into Queensland soldier settlement concluded that failures were significantly higher in that state than was reported in official documents. Johnson’s work shows not only the failure of group settlements in Queensland, but importantly questions official results on forfeitures and failures from other states.¹⁰ In Queensland, the incumbent Labor Party’s plans to expand their closer settlement policy extended to settling returned men on the land. Unlike most Australian states early in the twentieth century, Queensland had vast areas of virgin Crown land that could be used as an inducement to increase its population and land under production.¹¹ A Labor government under Thomas Ryan developed new agricultural policies which included co-operative farming and marketing ventures and training for inexperienced men.¹² Group settlement was an important feature of these

⁷ Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, H.J. Green, Government Printer, Melbourne, October 1925, p. 8.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 9, p. 23.

⁹ *ibid.*, Minority Report, H.J. Wiltshire, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰ M. Johnson, ‘Honour Denied: A Study of Soldier Settlement in Queensland, 1916-1929’, PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 2002, p. 420.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 85. It was estimated only 6 per cent of Queensland’s land was alienated in 1917.

¹² D. Cameron, ‘Closer settlement in Queensland: the rise and decline of the agrarian dream, 1860s to the 1960s’ in G. Davison, M. Brodie (eds), *Struggle Country: The Rural Ideal in Twentieth Century*

policies, albeit on a larger scale than the group settlements of the County of Cumberland.

At the February 1916 conference of Commonwealth and state ministers, Queensland's representatives, treasurer Edward Theodore and Minister for Public Lands John Hunter, said their state could settle 11,000 men on Crown lands if they received Commonwealth funding to develop infrastructure.¹³ By August the same year, the *Brisbane Courier* was confidently reporting 50,000 families could be supported on the state's available eight million acres.¹⁴ However, unlike soldier settlement schemes in other states, Queensland's scheme was not exclusively for returned men. Confidently announcing Queensland could settle 18,000 returned men on the land because of the almost limitless availability of Crown land, Labor politicians fully expected their land policy would be a triumph.¹⁵

The first soldier settlement in Queensland at Beerburrum, approximately forty miles north of Brisbane and adjacent to a railway siding, was part of over 50,000 acres of uncleared Crown land.¹⁶ By November 1916, 320 blocks of between twenty and forty acres had been marked out and allocated, including a large area for a training farm.¹⁷ Medically discharged men, including several limbless men with wooden legs, were

Australia, Monash University Press, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 06.8-06.9. The Labor government came to power in June 1915.

¹³ Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-73; Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 5 (1914-15-16-17), p. 1494.

¹⁴ Johnson, *ibid.*, p. 75; *Brisbane Courier*, 15 August 1916, p. 6.

¹⁵ New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, 1922, Vol. 1. Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings, and Debates of the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers, Melbourne, 22-27 January 1919, p. 23.

¹⁶ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹⁷ R. Hopkins, *The Beerburrum Story*, Department of Forestry, Queensland, 1987, p. 19, p. 25; Land was allocated at Beerburrum from November 1916, even though The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act was not enacted until early 1917; M. Johnson, ' "Promises and Pineapples": Post-First World War Soldier Settlement at Beerburrum, Queensland, 1916-1929', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 2005, p. 498.

among original settlers who hoped to build their future from virgin land.¹⁸ It was not long before detractors voiced their concerns. Responding to an article in *The Soldier*, for example, W. Burns Federal Organiser of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) wrote to the League's President about soldier settlement in Queensland. Burns had investigated all Australian states' soldier settlement schemes and concluded Queensland's scheme was inferior as most land set aside was either sub-standard or virgin and unsuitable for agriculture.¹⁹ Difficult and back-breaking work for fit men, Queensland's soldier settlement land was unsuited for pioneering farming for men recovering from war.

By 1920, in spite of government assurances Beerburrum group settlement was in difficulties, with *Smith's Weekly* calling for an enquiry and reporting that 'twelve months ago things looked rosy, but they look far from rosy today'.²⁰ The population at Beerburrum reached its height in 1921, but by the mid-1920s it was obvious the settlement was in crisis. Many remaining settlers were trapped in the poverty cycle, unable to afford to leave and yet not making a living.²¹ In addition to the main crop of pineapples requiring constant maintenance during growing, poor soils and low market prices all contributed to Beerburrum settlement being economically non-viable.²² Many settlers growing pineapples were over-capitalised and suffering financially, so a

¹⁸ Johnson, 'Honour Denied' *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110, quoting *Week* (Brisbane), 6 August 1920, p. 17 at the visit of the Prince of Wales to Beerburrum Settlement.

¹⁹ NAA: Repatriation Department; A2479, *Correspondence file, annual single number series, 1916-1918*, 18/88, Land Settlement Queensland. Beerburrum Group, 1917-1918. Letter from W. Burns, Federal Organiser to The President, Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' League, Melbourne, 24 October 1917. Burns said the proposal for a pineapple canning industry at Beerburrum Settlement would never be profitable.

²⁰ *Smith's Weekly*, 14 February 1920, p. 23.

²¹ Johnson, 'Promises & Pineapples', *op. cit.*, p. 504.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 502-504.

1923 government proposal that a state-wide co-operative be formed to market produce was rejected on economic grounds.²³

In March 1925, *The Daily Standard* was scathing in its criticism of Beerburrum's shortcomings. The article said land had been difficult to clear and crops failed, and not even grass for horse feed was able to thrive there. Continuing its condemnation of the government allocating this land to returned men, it said '30,000 acres were despised for generations until some agricultural genius suddenly discovered that its sandy ridges were suitable for growing pineapples ... [land that had been] left severely alone by land grabbers of the past'.²⁴ In spite of a 1924 confidential report that said Beerburrum had 'very little prospect of ... ever proving even a moderate success', Queensland Premier William McCormack dismissed these reports by saying they were simply campaigns to discredit the government during electioneering.²⁵ At Beerburrum as at many other soldier settlements men were frustrated, angry and depressed that their hopes for a better future post-war were ruined. Whether Edward Coghlan's plea to the press had any positive response is unlikely, but his words evoke the tensions and despair of failure. Coghlan said that of the 550 farms at Beerburrum, 370 men had already failed and forfeited. He said their experiences of soldier settlement had forced them to their knees, adding

²³ R.A. Hawkins, 'Socialism at Work? Corporatism, Soldier Settlers, and the Canned Pineapple Industry in South-Eastern Queensland, 1917-39', *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 4, December 1990, p. 41.

²⁴ NAA: Prime Minister's Department; A458, *Correspondence files, multiple number series, second system, 1 January 1899-31 December 1939*; N394/2 Repatriation: Land Settlement: Beerburrum Soldier Settlement, 1925-1926, *Daily Standard* 10 March 1925, 'Sand Farms at Beerburrum', no page number.

²⁵ *ibid.*, letter from W.McCormack, Premiers Office; Johnson, 'Honour Denied', *op. cit.*, p. 380 quoting a 'Confidential Report of the Revaluation Board' to William McCormack, Secretary for Public Lands, Brisbane, 21 October 1924.

Beerburrum has done what the famous Prussian Guards could not do – it has beaten the Digger. It has done what cold and mud and wet, the shells and gas, and bombs, could not do – it has broken the spirit of the Digger.²⁶

Soldier settlement at Beerburrum was a failure, but the area was again the site of a group settlement during the Depression years of the 1930s. Queensland's Minister for Labour Maurice Hynes announced the slogan, 'A Thousand Farms for A Thousand Workers' as part of the Labor government's unemployment relief scheme, with plans to settle 100 families at Beerburrum to grow tobacco.²⁷ Within three years it too had failed.²⁸ Some blamed the Queensland Labor Party and its land and agriculture policies for many of the land scheme failures. As the *Cairns Post* pointed out to its readers

Alas and alack for the dreams of a visionary ... Beerburrum – a happy hunting ground for Labor's dabbling in agriculture; tickle the soil and it will laugh with a harvest is one of the maxims in Labor's hand book.²⁹

Another large group settlement of about 17,000 acres was developed around Pikedale, approximately twenty miles from Stanthorpe and 150 miles from Brisbane.³⁰ Portions from twenty to seventy acres were subdivided for orchards and the Pikedale Soldier Settlement Co-operative Canning, Jam and Preserving Company was opened in December 1920.³¹ Politician William Green's speech at the opening of the factory

²⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 11 June 1924, p. 19, 'Soldier Settlers. Beerburrum Failure', cited in Johnson, 'Honour Denied', *op. cit.*, p. 422; NAA: Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office; B2455, 1st Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers 1914-1920, SERN 37782 Edward Joseph COGHLAN, was a gunner in the 4th Field Artillery Brigade who served in France from 1917.

²⁷ *The Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 29 September 1932, p. 7.

²⁸ *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 9 January 1935, p. 8 reports the failure of the 1933-1934 and 1935 crops, saying men were still on their blocks 'but it seems to be only a matter of time before they will have to leave'; R. Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 56; *The Courier-Mail*, 2 November 1933, p. 14 said previous reports that the tobacco settlement at Beerburrum was a 'tragic failure' and the community 'a colony of shattered hopes and simmering discontent' had been strongly denied by residents.

²⁹ *Cairns Post* (Queensland), 22 April 1935, p. 10.

³⁰ *Queensland. Soldier Settlement*, Office of the Agent-General for Queensland, London, p. 1. The four page brochure is undated, but it can be assumed that it was published during or shortly after the war.

³¹ *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 December 1920, p. 7. Legislative Assembly Member, William Green, extolled the virtues of group settlement at the opening. His speech alluded to the co-operative spirit of soldiers and their ability to never admit defeat under fire, to post-war civilian life.

was propaganda at its finest, but proved erroneous within a short time. Success was elusive, and the Pikedale Soldier Settlement became another statistic of failure.³² In 1927 newspapers labelled the Pikedale Settlement a ‘mistaken venture’.³³ Like the vast majority of group soldier settlers from the County of Cumberland it is highly possible that the failing health of soldier settlers as a result of war-related injuries and illnesses proved the final blow, forcing their surrender of blocks often unsuited to agriculture.

At least three poultry group settlements were established in Queensland at Mt Gravatt, Enoggera (The Gap) and Wolston.³⁴ In September 1917, *The Brisbane Courier* announced 268 acres of land at Yeerongpilly near Brisbane, had been acquired for poultry farms. Returned men would train at Gatton Agricultural College prior to being allocated blocks.³⁵ This was similar to the New South Wales group soldier settlement model already under development. Although 1918 press reports indicated satisfactory progress at all Queensland settlements, the tone had changed by 1921.³⁶ By mid-1922 more than half the Mt Gravatt farms were vacant, with many remaining ex-servicemen relying on their pension to make ends meet.³⁷ A desperate deputation from the Enoggera Settlement to the Prime Minister told him ‘the retreat from Mons

³² D. Parker, ‘An Assessment of Stanthorpe Soldier Settlement 1915-1930’ B.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1982, p. iii, pp. 102-104.

³³ *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 February 1927, p. 13.

³⁴ Johnson, ‘Honour Denied’, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

³⁵ *The Brisbane Courier*, 17 September 1917, p. 7. It appears the Yeeringpilly Estate became known as the Mt Gravatt Soldier Settlement; Johnson, ‘Honour Denied’, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152, pp. 155-156, states training facilities at Gatton were inadequate and stock inferior and diseased.

³⁶ *Cairns Post*, 27 June 1918, p. 7; See also, for example, *The Brisbane Courier*, 15 February 1921, p. 6; 18 February, p. 6; 21 April, p. 9.

³⁷ *The Queenslander*, 29 July 1922, p. 32. Mt Gravatt Settlement had 56 settlers, a comparable figure to Bankstown Soldier Settlement; Johnson, ‘Honour Denied’, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-155.

was nothing [compared] to it'.³⁸ Whilst Johnson argues that the 'agricultural revolution' foreseen through the implementation of the soldier settlement scheme never occurred, his research does not consider the health of returned men who became soldier settlers and how this affected their success.³⁹

On the opposite side of Australia, Western Australia like Queensland was a state with vast areas of unused land. However, attempting to unravel group soldier settlement in Western Australia is difficult because it ran concurrently with settlement programs for British immigrants, often leading to resentment by Australian returned men over benefits given to newcomers.⁴⁰ Although the Premier announced large numbers of returned men had already received land during the war, soldier settlement legislation was not introduced in Western Australia until late 1918.⁴¹ It appears that the Premier announced during the second reading of this bill that Western Australia would be adopting the same type of group soldier settlement provisions as already operated in New South Wales, although this did not happen.⁴² Historians have subsequently argued that Premier Lefroy, who also held the portfolio of Minister of Lands, took virtually no action to implement the 1918 *Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act*.⁴³

In November 1916 a poultry-training school was opened at West Subiaco, a suburb of the capital Perth, to train disabled men before they received their own five acre

³⁸ NAA: Prime Minister's Department; A457, *Correspondence files, multiple number series first system, 1 January 1900 - 31 December 1928*; X403/6, Repatriation. Poultry Farmers Returned Soldiers. The Enogerra delegation was in June 1922.

³⁹ Johnson, 'Honour Denied', *op. cit.*, pp. 416- 417.

⁴⁰ C. Lloyd, J. Rees, *The Last Shilling. A History of Repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 221.

⁴¹ J.P. Gabeddy, *Group Settlement. Part 1. Its Origins: Politics and Administration*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1988, p. 31. A Board was appointed in July 1917, but abolished six months later; *The Argus*, 10 October 1918, p. 7. Announcing the appointment of J.P.Camm as Superintendent of Soldier Settlements. Camm was formerly District Surveyor for Bridgeton.

⁴² *The Register* (Adelaide), 9 October 1918, p. 8.

⁴³ Gabeddy, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

property and stock.⁴⁴ How many men trained at this facility and then became poultry farmers is unknown, although at least one poultry settlement at Osborne Park near Perth was established and contained twenty-four blocks.⁴⁵ However, the Subiaco Training Farm appears to have soon become a 'white elephant' with no returned men receiving instruction.⁴⁶ West Australian Premier, Sir Henry Lefroy, said the poultry settlement at Osborne Park was intended to be for men physically unfit for heavier farm work or for war widows. Lefroy announced at the same time group soldier settlements were also planned for Korijekup near Harvey, Manjimup, Big Brook and Lake Grace.⁴⁷

As in other parts of Australia there was strong public pressure to develop soldier settlement in Western Australia, even when opinions varied as to the land's quality and suitability. One example that caused considerable media, political and league attention was the proposal by Lieutenant A. Tyrell Williams to purchase Riverton Estate, mid-way between Perth and Fremantle, for a large group settlement.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁴ *The Argus*, 7 November 1916, p. 10. 'Returned Soldiers. Poultry Farming School'; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 22 August 1916, p. 8. This article said the men would have six months' training and their farms would be supplied with 200 fowls.

⁴⁵ *The West Australian*, 14 December 1917, p. 8; 31 May 1917, p. 8, notes the Osborne Park property of 130 acres was purchased on the recommendations of staff at the Subiaco poultry school and the government poultry expert, Mr Allman.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 25 May 1917, p. 50.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 14 December 1917, p. 8. Premier Lefroy made these announcements at the opening of a Returned Soldiers' Land Information Bureau. Harvey, planned as an irrigation settlement, is eighty miles south of Perth, between Pinjarra and Bunberry. Manjimup is 100 miles south of Perth, approximately half way between Busselton and Albany. Big Brook is near Pemberton, 200 miles south of Perth. Lake Grace is in Western Australia's wheatbelt, approximately 200 miles south-east of Perth; *Sunday Times* (Perth), 13 January 1918, p. 7, states the government had determined on establishing two group settlements at Harvey and Lake Grace. The eighty blocks at Harvey, to be between thirty and 150 acres, would be primarily for grazing, whilst Lake Grace properties, averaging 1,000 acres would be for wheat.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *The West Australian*, 27 December 1917, p. 6. The article, written by Lieutenant Williams, explained his concept of group settlement for 800 people, on a 2,600 acre property that would be subdivided into smallholdings of up to ten acres. Williams believed returned soldiers 'viewed the prospect of solitary isolation in the back blocks with many misgivings. Having had the continuous companionship of other men under conditions of danger to life and limb, the returned soldier is desirous of continuing that companionship under more pleasant conditions away from the strife of warfare'.

government declined the offer to purchase after lengthy discussion in Cabinet, but not before considerable newspaper debate had been aired about the property's attributes.⁴⁹

It appears little further group settlement was undertaken by the government in Western Australia, although there is evidence to show that returned men remained interested. One newspaper correspondent said he and many returned men concluded group settlement continued to be officially discouraged because 'the Government of this State is bent on preventing group settlement of soldiers for fear of the development of a political power that will overthrow the powers that be'.⁵⁰ Whether there was any truth in this belief that a large group of returned men settled close together could prove politically disruptive and worried authorities, the push for this type of settlement continued during debate of the *Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Bill*. One member, Sir Edward Wittenoom, said he acknowledged many soldiers had returned to Australia unfit for heavy physical work, and whilst he realised group settlement had many advantages he was unsure if it would work in Australia.⁵¹ However, another parliamentarian said soldiers were strongly in favour of group settlement, especially close to urban centres and the government should accede to their wishes if possible, revealing that opinions were mixed about the benefits of this type of farming tenure.⁵²

⁴⁹ *The West Australian*, 7 January 1918, p. 6; 28 December 1917, p. 6, where a correspondent wrote in 'Letters to the Editor', 'history records many fanciful schemes brought into operation with a great flourish of trumpets but which crumbled to pieces ere they had been long in existence', arguing the land was worthless for soldier settlement; 10 January 1918, p. 6, correspondent Angus McLeod similarly said the land was poor, emphasising his argument by stating that 'a lizard would have to bring its own breakfast if it went there'.

⁵⁰ *The West Australian*, 21 October 1918, p. 6.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 12 December 1918, p. 8; G.C. Bolton, W. Birman, 'Wittenoom, Sir Edward Charles (Horne) (1854-1936)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 553-554. Wittenoom, a wealthy pastoralist with properties 400 miles north of Perth, came from a farming background and had a wide experience of Western Australian farming conditions.

⁵² *The West Australian*, 12 December 1918, p. 8.

Wives of prospective soldier settlers also lobbied for group settlements, arguing this type of settlement would provide positive social benefits for families used to an urban life. One writer said the thought of life ‘at the back of beyond’ as the wife of a soldier settler gave her ‘a queer sinking feeling’.⁵³ She saw prospects for herself and her family on a group settlement as much brighter, with a good social life, schools close by and others to help, admitting that was exactly what she and her husband wanted. Arguing that the Western Australian government should introduce more group soldier settlements, she said ‘I hope it will be preached until the men who have the responsibility of repatriation on their shoulders see “group settlements” in their dreams, and wake up to the fact that they have at last found what they were looking for – under their very noses’.⁵⁴

Amidst the group settlement policy for immigrants promoted by Premier Sir James Mitchell, requests for group soldier settlements continued. Delegates from the Ravensthorpe Repatriation Committee tried in 1919 to have a group soldier settlement for mixed farming and pig raising established near Hopetoun, 370 miles south of Perth, although it appears this did not eventuate.⁵⁵

⁵³ *ibid.*, 2 December 1918, p. 4. The writer was identified only as B.Y. from Leaderville, a Perth suburb.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 24 March 1919, p. 5. The proposal to Perth committees and the Discharged Soldiers’ Settlement Board said 200 men could be easily accommodated on land near the Phillips River goldfields; *The West Australian*, 23 May 1919, p. 6 reported Premier and Minister for Repatriation, James Mitchell, with the Controller of the Soldier Land Settlement Scheme, visiting the State Farm at Brunswick, near Bunbury, and said the area was perfect for a group soldier settlement and further investigations would be made; *The Western Argus* (Kalgoorlie) 23 August 1921, p. 16 and *The Western Mail* (Perth), 21 September 1921, p. 4 reported returned men had requested a group settlement for mixed farming be established at Southern Cross. These requests may have resulted in the report in *The Sunday Times*, 25 December 1921, p. 5, under the ‘Soldiers and Sailors Column’ that said the Premier had agreed to establish a returned soldiers’ group settlement following consultations with the returned servicemen’s league.

By 1920, the continuing community demands for group soldier settlement resulted in a soldier settlement publication in Western Australia, specifically noting group soldier settlement would be encouraged 'with the object of securing pleasant social conditions for the ex-soldier'.⁵⁶ As with New South Wales policy, authorities had decided settling returned men in groups would strengthen relationships already developed through shared war experiences, and men would be prepared to work co-operatively. The guide said repayment terms under Western Australian group settlement would be generous, encouraging men to believe the government-backed plans were infallible.⁵⁷

In March 1921, the first British migrant group settlement was established at Manjimup nearly 200 miles south of Perth, with twenty to thirty men working communally on twenty-five acre blocks supervised by a foreman.⁵⁸ Manjimup was not a soldier settlement, but it included ex-servicemen from the AIF and the Imperial Force as well as United Kingdom immigrants and unemployed men from Western Australia.⁵⁹ This group settlement soon failed with almost half the settlers leaving within a short time.⁶⁰ Contributing to failures for both migrants and locals alike was that the land selected for group settlement was sparsely populated and isolated, conditions exacerbated by a shortage of experienced managers who could assist new settlers.⁶¹ It is not known how ex-servicemen fared in comparison to immigrant settlers or what effect their war-related conditions had on their efforts to farm.

⁵⁶ *Western Australia Soldier Settlement Guide*, F.W. Simpson, Government Printer, Perth, 1920, pp. 3-9 explained ex-servicemen had to prove physical fitness and farming experience, and inexperienced men could train at an agricultural institution or with farmers. Supervisors would visit monthly.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ G. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1994, p. 34; *The West Australian*, 5 May 1921, p. 7 said Manjimup was formed mostly with ex-Imperial soldiers.

⁵⁹ I.L. Hunt, 'A History of Group Settlement in the South-West of Western Australia', M.A. Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1957, pp. 1-5.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 54. This report states nearly half the Australians and a third of the immigrants had forfeited.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 7, pp. 27-28.

Minister for Lands Michael Troy later said that ‘the scheme largely was experimental, the country was experimental, the development largely experimental – the administration was blindly groping in the dark’.⁶² Although group settlements had been widely publicised in government brochures as well supervised with a willing co-operative ethos, many later claimed the reality was far different.⁶³ Group settlement in Western Australia has subsequently been referred to by historians as an example of the disastrous consequences that a combination of ‘the optimistic belief of politicians’ and poor planning can produce.⁶⁴

In late 1922, a Royal Commission into the Western Australian soldier settlement scheme was called. As in New South Wales, less than five years after the war soldier settlement in that state was in crisis. Controller E.A. McLarty said the Osborne Park poultry farms for disabled ex-servicemen had been unsuccessful. He believed the men’s inexperience coupled with their disabilities were responsible for the failure, adding that these farms ‘from a practical point of view ... had been more creditable to heart than to head’.⁶⁵ McLarty recognised many returned men had physical disabilities, but made no other consideration about why they had chosen soldier settlement to earn their living. Expressing some empathy with the plight of disabled soldier settlers, McLarty still made negative comments about many of these men. Similar to many comments contained in loan files from group soldier settlers in the

⁶² G. Taylor, ‘The Development of Group Settlement in Western Australia’, *The Economic Record*, Vol. 6, No. 1, May 1930, p. 42. The date of the speech is not known.

⁶³ M. Brayshay, J. Selwood, ‘Dreams, Propaganda and Harsh Realities: Landscapes of Group Settlement in the Forest Districts of Western Australia in the 1920s’, *Landscape Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2002, p. 86; p. 97 quotes *The Age* (Melbourne) criticising the Western Australian group settlement scheme as a project that wasted millions of pounds on useless land.

⁶⁴ G. Taylor, ‘Group Settlement in Western Australia’, in F.W. Eggleston, P.D. Phillips, G. Packer, E. Scott and S.S. Addison (eds), *The Peopling of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1933, p. 293; G. Bolton, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ *The West Australian.*, 26 May 1923, p. 8 ‘Soldier Settlers. Their Complaints. The Controller’s Criticism’.

County of Cumberland that indicated men were lazy or their blocks were poorly worked, he argued that

many of the failures were attributable to lack of energy in the settlers. [McLarty] could prove that statement up to the hilt. Some of the men were utterly unfitted for farming. They had tried other occupations, and were merely “giving the land a fly”.⁶⁶

With little official recognition of the difficulties many returned men had readapting to civilian life, there was little to show that Australia post-war would build the promised land fit for heroes.

In South Australia, legislation for soldier settlement was introduced in December 1915, within months of the first report by former Prime Minister Chris Watson that recommended one possible employment post-war was settling returned men on the land.⁶⁷ The following year the government purchased 380 acres near Adelaide for poultry farms, with plans to employ a manager to help inexperienced men.⁶⁸ This scheme was similar to the group poultry settlements in this study, but no further reference has been located about its success or failure, or even if the proposal proceeded. From early 1916 the Pompoota Agricultural Training Farm, forty miles south-east of Adelaide, provided training for returned men keen to become soldier settlers.⁶⁹ Pompoota provided training for a range of farming activities, including poultry farming. In late 1916 the South Australian Minister for Agriculture said that

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ South Australian Parliament, ‘A Bill for An Act to make Provision for the Settlement of Discharged Soldiers on Crown Lands’, No. 99, 1915; NAA: Repatriation Department; A2487, *Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1918- 1929*, 17/1050 Federal Parliamentary War Committee printed papers, ‘Returned Soldiers. Employment and Settlement’, 17 September 1915.

⁶⁸ *The Queenslander*, 2 December 1916, p. 7; *The Register*, 20 January 1917, p. 11 considered the co-operative system for farms at Kangaroo Island and near Adelaide to be ‘essential’ for success; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 23 November 1916, p. 8 reported the government purchase of 379 acres at Northcliffe, an Adelaide suburb, that would be subdivided into small blocks of approximately three acres for poultry farms. The settlement was expected to house fifty families.

⁶⁹ *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 28 March 1916, p. 6 records that the first batch of trainees, initially limited to twenty-five, was about to begin training. It was expected that the training farm would eventually accommodate 100 returned men.

poultry group soldier settlements would be formed, with poultry expert Mr D.F. Laurie saying it was 'an occupation well suited for wounded and delicate men'.⁷⁰

Remembering his time at Pompoota, Bert Denman considered himself among the fortunate few, especially with unemployment high immediately after the war. He recalled that

many of them had been wounded, gassed or injured or had fallen to some war time sickness. Some had seen several years' service and all would have been under considerable tension, such as only came with stressful war time service. Quite a number had been discharged medically unfit.⁷¹

Bert's memories resonate with medical files and notations of soldier settlers in this study. They were damaged men, unable to find other employment, who were hoping to become successful soldier settlers. How many of the men who trained at Pompoota later failed?

During the South Australian Labor Party's period in government from 1915 to 1917, the local press made several references about plans to introduce co-operative soldier settlements. Co-operative farming enterprises were planned on Kangaroo Island for dairying, pig-raising and orchards, but no further mention of this scheme can be found after early 1917.⁷² Similarly, no further mention of allocating small blocks of land close to the city for soldier settlement for partially-disabled men can be found after 1916.⁷³ In 1918 some consideration was given to establishing semi-rural co-operative settlements near Adelaide, but they never materialised.⁷⁴ It appears the co-operative

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 8 September 1916, p. 6.

⁷¹ A.E. Denman, 'The Pompoota Story', *Sabretache*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1989, pp. 3-5.

⁷² *The Register*, 5 September 1916, p. 3; 22 September 1916, p. 8; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 22 September 1916, p. 11.

⁷³ *The Register*, 9 November 1916, p. 7.

⁷⁴ H.N. Barwell, 'South Australia – Soldiers Settlements. Repatriation in relation to the establishment of new industries for returned soldiers, and the town planning problems connected therewith', Second

settlements planned by Labor ministers never eventuated. According to a 1922 report, only fifteen soldier settlers in South Australia were engaged in the 'miscellaneous pursuits' of pig-raising, poultry or bee-keeping.⁷⁵ As in other states, South Australian authorities recognised many returned men had problems readjusting or coping with civilian life, but soldier settlement policies did not make allowances for these handicaps.

Tasmanian legislation for a Returned Soldiers' Settlement Bill was introduced in late 1916, and even during its debate doubt was raised about the amount of available suitable land.⁷⁶ In 1918 a report said men preferred established smallholdings, an unsurprising comment given all those settled had been discharged physically unfit before the end of the war, ill-equipped for pioneering farming.⁷⁷ Acknowledging returned men faced physical and emotional difficulties coping with the return to civilian life and that most were inexperienced, a subsequent report explained failures were 'attributed either to incapacity or little desire for work'.⁷⁸ Tasmania initially offered no training for inexperienced men, leaving soldier settlers in this state disadvantaged over their counterparts in mainland Australia.⁷⁹ Minister for Lands Sir Alexander Hean subsequently announced his department was considering introducing a limited farming scheme for returned men based on a co-operative model with men

Annual Town Planning Conference and Exhibition, Brisbane 30 July to 6 August, 1918, p. 6. These proposals were put forward by Professor Perkins, South Australian Director of Agriculture.

⁷⁵ *The Advertiser*, 19 December 1922, p. 8. The article refers to the 1922 Report from the Superintendent of Soldier Settlements.

⁷⁶ Q. Beresford, 'The World War One Soldier Settlement Scheme in Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 30, No. 3, September 1983, p. 90; *The Mercury*, 8 December 1916, p. 7.

⁷⁷ 1918 Parliament of Tasmania (No. 40), Soldiers' Settlement Board Report for 1917-18, pp. 1-2. This report noted there had already been forfeits amongst the earliest soldier settlers.

⁷⁸ 1919 Parliament of Tasmania (No. 58), Soldiers' Settlement Board Report for 1918-19, p. 2. This report said only half the men were making any progress.

⁷⁹ NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1919/810. Land Settlement Conference Part 2. Commonwealth Department of Repatriation. Minute Paper. Sustenance while awaiting land. 20 March 1919, p. 4.

working under supervision.⁸⁰ A year later the Minister said legislation had been amended to allow for group settlement, with farms at Campania to operate under this method.⁸¹ It is not known how successful this limited form of group soldier settlement was in Tasmania, although allegations were later made in parliament that supervision of settlers had been ‘haphazard’.⁸² It is unsurprising many Tasmanian soldier settlers forfeited or failed with little practical support from experienced agriculturalists. The Tasmanian government as with other states did not consider the impact of the recurrence of war disabilities, or whether inexperienced men with no capital could ever succeed as farmers. As probably happened in many areas of Australia, strong community pressure in Tasmania’s Huon Valley that anyone who volunteered to serve should receive land, saw all applicants approved, in spite of the official government policy.⁸³

It was nearly a year after the Armistice before land for soldier settlement was offered in the Federal Capital Territory.⁸⁴ It seems confusion about land entitlement was rife in this region, with complaints about the ‘inconvenient and haphazard way the Returned Soldier Settlement blocks within the Federal Capital Area are being dealt

⁸⁰ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 25 October 1919, p. 3. The newspaper was quoting the Minister’s Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly, 24 October 1919. George Foster, Secretary of the Tasmanian Returned Soldiers’ League, visited New South Wales to inspect their plans for inexperienced men, submitting a report on poultry group settlements to the Government.

⁸¹ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 1 October 1920, p. 7. Not all the twenty-four soldier settlers at Campania worked under this plan. Campania is approximately twenty miles north of Hobart.

⁸² *The Mercury*, 20 January 1922, p. 4; 1921 Parliament of Tasmania (No. 61), Returned Soldiers’ Settlers: Report of Select Committee. pp. 1-4. The Committee had recommended the appointment of permanent supervisors who were responsible for practical instruction and advice to inexperienced soldier settlers.

⁸³ C. Martin, ‘The Great War’s Aftermath in the Huon’, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 42, No. 1, March 1995, pp. 44-46. Nearly half these men had forfeited their orchards by the mid-1920s, sixty per cent by 1930.

⁸⁴ S. Pfanner, ‘Soldier settlement subdivisions in the Federal Capital Territory after World War I’, *Canberra Historical Journal*, No. 37, March 1996, p. 29. Pfanner states land was first offered in September 1919.

with or, rather, not dealt with'.⁸⁵ Based on the figures for financial advances to soldier settlers, less than a hundred returned men took up land under this scheme in the Federal Capital Territory and none were under group settlement tenure.⁸⁶

This chapter has revealed that whilst states other than New South Wales considered small group soldier settlements, few were established. How widespread the demand for group settlements were among returned men remains an unknown. Group poultry settlements near Brisbane in Queensland and at Osborne Park in South Australia failed within a few years, although there was little official recognition of why these returned men could not farm profitably on their small acreages. Group soldier settlements in Australia, considered to be either optimistic, experimental or poorly planned, never realised the hopes of returned men needing to re-build their lives post-war. In the next section of this chapter overseas group soldier settlements are examined to determine if failure was uniquely Australian.

Group Soldier Settlement Overseas

As noted in Chapter One, Australia was not alone amongst English-speaking countries in considering making rural lands available for its returning troops after World War I. Several countries considered or introduced group soldier settlements, believing, as in Australia, that men would be prepared to continue working co-operatively together as they had during the war. Planners also believed this type of settlement would address the isolation of single farms, providing especially inexperienced men with emotional

⁸⁵ NAA: Lands and Survey Branch; A192, *Correspondence files, annual single number series with FCL [Federal Capital Lands] prefix, 1 January 1901-31 December 1927*; FCL1920/471 Soldier Settlement- Representations from Returned Soldiers League, 1919-1921. Letter from E.V. Grace, President Duntroon Sub-Branch, RSSILA RMC Duntroon to Prime Minister Hughes 25 November 1919.

⁸⁶ Pfanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30. By 1925 advances of £35,450 had been made to soldier settlers in the Territory.

and social support from their peers. As already discussed, co-operative societies to purchase and market farm goods were formed in the group settlements in this study, and were also considered in group settlement plans in England, Canada and the United States.

In response to the British report, *Settlement or Employment on the Land in England and Wales of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers*, four group settlements were planned in England to provide farms for 240 ex-servicemen and their families.⁸⁷ ‘Colonies’ would consist of a central farm surrounded by small farms, with a maximum size of fifty acres. Training for inexperienced men would be on-site at the central farm, and co-operatives would purchase and sell produce.⁸⁸ Similar to large numbers of returned men on group settlements in the County of Cumberland in this thesis, the British colonies comprised ex-servicemen medically discharged during the war.

It is not known how successful group settlements were in Britain, although reports that the *Land Settlement Bill* was hastily prepared and then delayed because of prolonged debate in the House of Commons are strong indicators of dissent and concerns over its probable success. With applications by ex-servicemen for soldier settlement considerably lower than the expected 750,000, newspaper comments that

⁸⁷ *Final Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries to consider the Settlement or Employment on the Land in England and Wales of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers*, Parliamentary Publication [Cd.8182], Eyre and Spittiswoode, London, 1916; A.R. Uvedale Corbett, ‘Empire Land Settlement’, *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1917, pp. 195-196. The 1916 *Small Holding Colonies Act* incorporated recommendations of the earlier report into the settlement or employment of discharged troops. Similar settlements were planned for Scotland.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, Corbett.

legislation was ‘surrounded with difficulties which would strain the wisdom of a Solomon’ contain elements of veracity not initially recognised by politicians.⁸⁹

In Canada, a British Columbian report released during the war similarly recommended community settlements working on a co-operative model be established post-war for returned men.⁹⁰ This Canadian plan was no different from New South Wales poultry group soldier settlements. Whilst these reconstruction schemes did not, and realistically could not make allowances for ex-servicemen who returned from war damaged in mind or body, group settlement in Canada as in other parts of the world, appeared to be a workable suggestion during the war.

In Ontario from early 1917 interned men from belligerent countries cleared forest land in the Cochrane District for several group settlements.⁹¹ The settlement at Kapuskasing had a central village with plans to build a sawmill, school, and shops, but the co-operative spirit quickly faded.⁹² Failing within three years, a government

⁸⁹ C.A. Lockwood, ‘From Soldier to Peasant? The Land Settlement Scheme in East Sussex, 1919-1939’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Autumn 1998, p. 444; *The Times*, 31 March 1919, p. 13, ‘Land Settlement’. The public also questioned the efficacy of a soldier settlement scheme, for example, Howard Frank wrote ‘Many of those to be placed on the land for the first time will not, I fear, succeed in making a living. The loss will fall upon the State – it may be a loss we ought to meet, but let there be no misapprehension ... It is not even charity to help a man to failure’, *The Times*, 12 February 1919, p. 8; K. Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes. Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire between the Wars*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, p. 44, stated only one third of men provisionally allotted land had been settled by late 1920; C. Bathurst, ‘The Land Settlement of Ex-Servicemen’, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. 88, No. 465, pp. 1097-1098. In 1915 Charles Bathurst, a Conservative Party parliamentarian, advised caution, noting previous closer settlement policies, such as the 1907 *Small Holdings Act* had proven to be a failure in Britain. He said the unnatural creation of smallholdings failed, ‘like most land schemes initiated by politicians whose social aspirations are commendable but whose agricultural knowledge and experiences are small’.

⁹⁰ P.M. Koroscil, ‘Soldiers, Settlement and Development in British Columbia, 1915-1930’, *BC Studies*, No. 54, Summer 1982, pp. 64-65. The report reasoned group soldier settlement offered advantages to returned men, with training and assistance from experts on-site, socialising with like-minded settlers, as well as profiting from co-operative purchasing and marketing.

⁹¹ Fedorowich, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

⁹² M. Paterson, *Carved from the forest: a history of Kasuskasing*, Northern Times, Kapuskasing, Ontario, 1967, p. 14, p. 17. Paterson states six townships were planned at O’Brien (part of Kapuskasing), Owens, Williamson, Idlington, Cumming and Shakleton all located approximately sixty

inquiry determined that the severe climate, heavy forest and poor soil conditions all contributed to its failure.⁹³ The inquiry found that while many of the returned men at the Kapuskasing colony had physical and ‘temperamental’ disabilities due to war service, the regimental army practices had stifled men’s initiative and the paternalism inherent in the government scheme had reinforced this attitude.⁹⁴ Another large group settlement of 900 farms at Porcupine in Saskatchewan struggled to survive as it was pioneer farming at its harshest. Swamp lands, dense forests and scrub contributed to problems clearing land for farming, with communication networks and transport virtually non-existent. As with other Canadian group settlements, ten years after establishment few original settlers remained.⁹⁵

A private enterprise for soldier settlement was begun by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, offering men either individual blocks or group settlement that had a central training farm surrounded by small established farms.⁹⁶ The group settlement at Anzac in Alberta was typical of this plan and contained twenty-five mixed farms.⁹⁷ By 1919 Anzac was well established with 160 acre farms where settlers had a home, some livestock and forty acres sown with wheat. Harsh climatic conditions and the isolation

to seventy miles from Cochrane, with plans to settle 3,000 men in these group communities; Fedorowich, *op. cit.*, states five townships were planned.

⁹³ W. Kirkconnell, ‘Kapusksasing – An Historical Sketch’, *Bulletin of the Departments of History and Political and Economic Science in Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada*, No. 38, January 1921, pp. 13-14. The soldier settlement scheme at Kapuskasing cost the government in excess of C\$800,000 in its attempt to settle 101 men.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹⁵ Fedorowich, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-88; C. Turnor, ‘Land Settlement for Ex-Service Men in the Oversea Dominions’, Report to the Royal Colonial Institute, The St Catherine Press, London, 1920, p. 5, pp. 11-12 criticised the Canadian model. Turnor’s vision of small acreage farms under intensive cultivation took no account of the extremes of Canadian climate, its geography or soils; E.C. Morgan, ‘Soldier Settlement in the Prairie Provinces’, *Saskatchewan History*, Spring 1968, pp. 53-55 relates similar problems were experienced at the settlement at Prairie River, where settlers had to contend with clearing land, draining swamps, insect plagues and isolation.

⁹⁶ Fedorowich, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁹⁷ Turnor, *op. cit.*, p. 18; P. Mitchell, E.E. Prepas, *Atlas of Alberta Lakes*, University of Alberta Press, Alberta, 1990, p. 140. In 1916 state surveyors from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps working near Lake Gregoire chose Anzac for the township’s name.

of this region led some authorities soon after establishment to question whether both men and women would be able to overcome these disadvantages and become successful pioneer settlers.⁹⁸

Early in the war, governments in British Columbia and New Brunswick considered the viability of establishing group or 'colony' settlements that would train inexperienced men and provide good transport links to market, but these plans appear not to have been implemented after a national soldier settlement scheme was established.⁹⁹ Within a few years previous ideals of the advantages of group settlement had officially changed, with group or colony soldier settlement seen by many authorities as a crutch used by less-experienced men which discouraged independence.¹⁰⁰ Suggestions made in both Britain and Canada early in the war about the benefits of group settlement for returned men revealed aspects of social idealism and reform plans for after the war. Later changes could have been caused by war-weariness, affecting both politicians and the community, as well as concerns about the communist principles of group settlement, following events in Russia in 1917.

One of the first countries to make and implement plans for post-war, New Zealand introduced *The Discharged Soldiers Settlement Bill* into parliament in September

⁹⁸ Turnor, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19 notes most of the settlers at Anzac were English or Scottish. No evidence of the success or failure of this settlement has been discovered during the current research.

⁹⁹ J.M. Powell, 'Soldier Settlement in Canada 1915-1930', *Working Paper No. 7*, March 1979, Monash University, p. 6. Powell notes the influence of British town planner, Thomas Adams, employed during the war by the Canadian Commission of Conservation. Adams recommended co-operative farm colonies similar to the British Garden City of Letchworth, established at the beginning of the twentieth century. See also D. Hardy, *1899-1999*, Town and Country Planning Association, London, 1999, www.tcpa.org.uk, accessed 8 April 2011; *Western Mail* (Perth), 5 January 1917, p. 50 reported Canada would introduce colonies for soldier settlers, possibly with leaders of their own choice, and noting British Columbia had already introduced a colony scheme, with consideration being given to this type of settlement by other prairie colonies. In lauding a colony scheme for soldier settlement, the report concluded that 'a body of soldier colonists united by comradeship in arms, should have every prospect of success'.

¹⁰⁰ *Soldier Settlement on the Land. Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 March 1921, F.A. Acland, Government Printer, Ottawa, 1921, p. 12.

1915, with legislation allowing both fit and partially-disabled men to apply.¹⁰¹ As previously noted in Chapter One, New Zealand authorities gave no credence to a policy of group settlement, believing men would not work co-operatively supporting others who could do less work, similar to Canadian concerns.¹⁰²

A group settlement planned for Canterbury on the South Island was withheld from offer because inexperienced men showed little interest in this scheme.¹⁰³ By early 1918, these medically-discharged ex-servicemen were keen to secure their own block of land before the bulk of fit men returned at war's end, although why they refused training is unknown. Publications advertising the benefits of soldier settlement could perhaps have convinced them of the ease of earning their living in the fresh air and that they could easily acquire all the farming skills they would need. With only a small percentage of New Zealand's soldier settler files now extant in government archives, a more complete story of soldier settlement, and particularly group settlement, appears improbable.¹⁰⁴

In the United States of America, Elwood Mead strongly supported by Secretary of State Franklin K. Lane, was keen to develop group soldier settlements as part of government planned communities post-war.¹⁰⁵ Lane argued group soldier settlement

¹⁰¹ J.M. Powell, 'Soldier Settlement in New Zealand, 1915-1923', *Australian Geographical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, October 1971, p. 145.

¹⁰² Turnor, *op. cit.*, p. 63. Appendix III. Letter from D.H. Guthrie, Minister of Lands, November 1919 to Christopher Turnor, Esq.

¹⁰³ New Zealand Department of Lands and Survey, Discharged Soldiers Settlement, Report for the Year ended 31st March 1918, pp. 2-3. The land was the Homebrook Estate at Southbridge. Offers to train returned men at Department of Agriculture farms similarly had little response according to this report.

¹⁰⁴ A. Gould, 'From Taiaha to Ko: Repatriation and Land Settlement for Maori Soldiers in New Zealand after the First World War', *War and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2009, p. 68. Gould states only approximately ten per cent of files held by the Lands and Survey Head Office survive, and are mainly Crown leasehold paperwork.

¹⁰⁵ P.K. Conkin, 'The Vision of Elwood Mead', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1960, p. 90; *Report of the State Land Settlement Board of the State of California. September 30, 1920*, California

would reinforce farming as vital to the American economy and way of life and contribute to social stability, stating '[the] spirit of democracy does not thrive where men live without hope of land ownership. There is something peculiarly subtle in the feeling that a bit of the soil is one's own. It makes for a stronger, higher citizenship'.¹⁰⁶ Mead believed self-contained communities would address rural America's disadvantaged social conditions caused by a previous lack of government planning. The group settlements Mead envisaged would offer extended payment terms, farming supervision, and commercial and social co-operatives all geared to build a strong community spirit. As a result of his lobbying, two Californian group settlement communities were established at Durham and Delhi.¹⁰⁷

The first soldier settlement in the United States, an orchard group settlement at Delhi in Merced County was opened in February 1920.¹⁰⁸ Later plans subdivided part of this settlement into fifty-five acre poultry farms for forty ex-servicemen and a number of experienced poultry farmers. Future plans, to be implemented after the poultry farms were fully operational, included a cold storage unit and a co-operative marketing scheme.¹⁰⁹ American authorities agreed returned men needed both capital and experience to succeed in group settlements. Although men with war-related injuries were not excluded from applying for this group settlement, their application was not

State Printing Office, Sacramento, 1922, p. 59 notes the Californian *State Land Settlement Act* of 1917 was amended to include soldiers and sailors; B.G. Reid, 'Proposed American Plans for Soldier Settlement During the World War I Period', PhD Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1963, p. 2 states President Woodrow Wilson supported soldier settlement; J.M. Powell, 'Elwood Mead and California's State Colonies: An Episode in Australian-American Contacts 1915-31', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 1982, pp. 338-339. As previously outlined, Elwood Mead worked in Victoria developing closer settlement irrigation schemes for eight years.

¹⁰⁶ Conkin, *op. cit.*, p. 92. Annual Report of the Department of the Interior 1918, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 90. Durham contained 110 farms and thirty smaller allotments for farm labourers, Delhi was only for soldier settlers.

¹⁰⁸ *The Evening News* (San Jose, California), 2 January 1920, p. 3. The article announces the impending opening of the settlement.

¹⁰⁹ *The Evening News*, 2 June 1921, p. 3.

encouraged.¹¹⁰ Delhi group settlement was intended only for returned men who were fit enough to work poultry farms and orchards, revealing the government believed healthy men had better prospects to become successful farmers.

Both Durham and Delhi settlements failed with the government liquidating its holdings in 1928.¹¹¹ According to government reports, contributing factors in the failure of both group settlements was an over-reliance on government agencies.¹¹²

Post-war group communities or settlements in the United States proved not to be the answer to the rural crisis Elwood Mead had predicted.¹¹³ The inter-war period of the American back-to-the-land movement, which advocated communities of civilian and ex-soldier farmers living and working together, as in so many other countries, was a failure.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that group soldier settlement schemes in Australia and other English-speaking countries after World War I were not successful. Canadian ex-servicemen were defeated by virgin lands isolated from markets and other communities, in addition to having to battle extreme climate conditions. American plans faced strong protests from established farmers and concerns that innovative Californian land policies contained communist philosophies anathema to democratic nations. Inexperience and lack of capital contributed in many countries to the failure

¹¹⁰ Report of ...Land Settlement Board... California, 1920, *op. cit.*, p. 59. The report recommended any soldier settlement for disabled men be administered by another department that could also cater for all their medical and training needs.

¹¹¹ R. England, 'Soldier Settlement: Revising the Oldest Rehabilitation Prospectus', *The Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 4, November 1944, p. 288.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *Lodi News Sentinel*, 8 July 1935, p. 1. The State Land Settlement Board of California was abolished in 1935, marking the close of post-World War I group communities in the United States.

of returned men on the land after World War I. In Britain, whilst group settlements were encouraged during the war, the reality of politics and a straitened economy post-war meant few returned men were satisfied in their hunger for land. Group settlement in New Zealand was not popular according to government sources because returned men were determined to be independent.

This chapter has also shown that the optimism of a revitalised society post-war, with new group settlements geared to meet the economic and social needs of all its residents, both returned men and their families, failed to materialise in Australia and other English-speaking countries. By the end of the 1920s group soldier settlements were considered to have failed, as graphically shown in the preceding chapters about the settlements in the County of Cumberland. Designed to provide homes and a profitable business for nearly 200 returned men and their families, the group settlements in this study never met expectations. This thesis has argued that ex-servicemen chose the County of Cumberland group settlements because their war disabilities prevented a return to physical pre-war labour, yet they needed to make a living. Previous chapters have revealed these group settlements soon failed, with hundreds of men realising they were not well enough to manage a small farm. As this chapter has discussed through a brief overview of group soldier settlement in other parts of Australia and overseas, success also proved elusive, although none of the investigations considered returned men's physical or mental health as possible contributing factors in their failure as has been argued throughout this thesis.

The final chapter of this thesis examines inquiries into soldier settlement during the 1920s by Australian state and Commonwealth governments. It will argue that

although soldier settlers on the group settlements in the County of Cumberland actively participated in attempts to improve the terms and conditions of their tenures, little changed. Men were still over-burdened by debt on land that produced less primary produce than expected but most importantly, their health continued to suffer due to war-related injuries and disabilities.

Chapter Eight

Inquiries and the Aftermath

This thesis has revealed that group soldier settlement post-World War I was never the success predicted by politicians or the community, both across Australia and in other English-speaking countries. Group soldier settlement in the County of Cumberland, promoted as both innovative and especially suited to returned men inexperienced in farming, neither increased agricultural production as much as forecasted, nor provided ex-servicemen with a secure living in the post-war period. Nor did it become 'the land settlement of the future' so confidently predicted by New South Wales Minister for Lands, William Ashford.¹ Soldier settlers on the six group settlements in this study initially believed they could be successful, but hope soon faded. Post-World War I large numbers of returned men on these group settlements struggled simply to make a living, before finally realising the inevitable and forfeiting. They found they were unable to work even a small acreage of land because of their war-related disabilities. Evidence has shown that many of these men after leaving their farms never had permanent work again.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on the New South Wales inquiries, the 1920 Street Royal Commission and the 1922 Select Committee Report that particularly affected the group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland. Although percentages of soldier settler failures as cited in the 1929 report by Justice Pike have recently been challenged by historians, Pike's report remains the only comparative

¹ State Records of New South Wales: *Department of Lands, Returned Soldier Settlement Miscellaneous Files*, NRS 8056 [19/7028] Press release to *The Sunday Times*, 7 April 1919.

examination of losses for the soldier settlement scheme post-World War I across Australia.² For this reason, the findings of the Pike Report in relation to the results of this study of group soldier settlements are also addressed in this chapter. A critical finding of Pike's report was that enormous sums of money were wasted or lost with soldier settlement schemes, but it reveals little about how returned men who became soldier settlers coped with their return to civilian life.³

Cracks soon appeared in the group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland. Two New South Wales government investigations, the Street Royal Commission of 1920 and the Parliamentary Select Committee Report of 1922, were established specifically to deal with these group settlements. Amid allegations of corruption and maladministration, the inquiries were meant to determine why the settlers were unsuccessful. Both inquiries noted high land and commodity prices had impacted on the size of men's debts, and in some instances corrupt practices had occurred but neither considered whether these returned men were experiencing problems due to war-related health issues. No mention is made in official files of how men's post-war health, both mental and physical, impacted on how or if they could work a small farm.

A year after the Armistice Premier Holman requested Chaplain William McKenzie of the Salvation Army, a popular man with troops during the war, investigate returned men's grievances with the soldier settlement scheme.⁴ As argued in Chapter Two,

² See, for example, M. Johnson, 'Honour Denied: a study of soldier settlement in Queensland, 1916-1929', PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 2002.

³ Justice Pike, *Report on Losses Due to Soldier Settlement*, H.J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, 24 August 1929, p. 6. While Pike was given fifteen terms of reference to investigate, the bulk of the report focused on financial losses, which totalled, according to Pike £23,525,522.

⁴ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November 1919, p. 10; M. McKernan, *Padre. Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p. 3. Chaplain Mackenzie, known as 'Fighting Mac', had served with distinction in Gallipoli and France and was popular with Australian soldiers during and after the war for his straightforward approach.

Holman had a vested interest in the scheme as one of its key architects in New South Wales. Holman and his Labor government believed that a group settlement policy would work to the benefit of both returned men and the state. After visiting many settlements McKenzie reported that in his opinion the government was 'acting in a helpful, parental way, and manifesting praiseworthy interest in the well-being of the settlers'.⁵ Whilst the actual grievances have not been identified, Holman's choice of McKenzie was astute as men were confident he would address their concerns honestly and practically and they trusted him to represent their interests. The need for such an enquiry so early on identifies however, that government concerns about the viability of soldier settlement were evident soon after the scheme was introduced.

In June 1920, the New South Wales government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the administration of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Board (RSSB), extending earlier inquiries begun by the Public Service Board and the Department of Lands.⁶ Commissioner Mr Justice Street was appointed and given seven wide-ranging terms of reference to investigate which included land acquisition, tenures or types of settlements, construction practices and payments.⁷ Newspaper advertisements advised that any persons wanting to give evidence should contact the Commission Secretary.⁸ Delegates from several group settlements in the current study applied to give

⁵ *SMH*, 29 November 1919, p. 14.

⁶ New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 1, 1921. Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry (Mr Justice Street) into The Administration of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch, Department of Lands. 23 August 1921, p. 808. The Department of Lands inquiry was initiated in May 1919; *SMH*, 20 August 1920, p. 7; www.parliament.nsw.gov.au, accessed 1 March 2011. William Holman's term as Premier ended in April 1920. Holman's demise as leader may be one reason for the appointment two months later of a Royal Commission.

⁷ *ibid.*, NSWPP, p. 807; *The Soldier*, 3 September 1920, p. 8 reported that the RSSILA retained solicitor Alroyd Cohen to represent their members at this Commission.

⁸ SRNSW: *Secretary's minutes books (exhibits) [Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Administration of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Board, Department of Lands, NRS 1527 [3/9602]*, newspaper clippings from *The Sun*, *Evening News*, *Sun*, *Sunday Sun*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

evidence, with James Morrison from Bankstown Soldier Settlement elected as their Chairman.⁹ Several settlers from Chipping Norton gave evidence of poor building practices and flooding at their settlement. David Beveridge also claimed poor quality birds had been supplied from Grantham Stud at high prices, which added to men's debts.¹⁰ Commissioners visited Grantham, Hillview and Bankstown settlements to personally examine the quality of building and construction materials. The only written record of these visits notes that at Hillview 'many structural defects' were seen.¹¹

A significant part of the Royal Commission proceedings covered anomalies in the acquisition of Grantham Estate. Investigations were made to ascertain if correct procedures were followed to determine its suitability, viability and value for soldier settlement. Crown Solicitor George Pike, acting on behalf of the government, would several years later be charged with reporting on soldier settlement losses Australia-wide.¹² The value of the training at Grantham was also investigated with Samuel Murphy from Bankstown Settlement, giving evidence that he only received seventeen days training, and a Campbelltown settler saying his three months' instruction he considered to be almost worthless.¹³ No information survives about what instruction and training returned men received at Grantham, but as discussed in Chapter Five, approximately a third of the men in the settlements in this study had undertaken

⁹ *SMH*, 24 August 1920, p. 9. There were nine soldier settler delegates representing five settlements, they are not named.

¹⁰ *SMH*, 25 September 1920, p. 14; 28 September 1920, p. 10.

¹¹ SRNSW: NRS 1527 [3/9602], *op. cit.*, 1 September 1920.

¹² *SMH*, 4 September 1920, p. 14; Justice Pike, *Report on Losses due to Soldier Settlement*, H.J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, 24 August 1929; Pike was employed in the survey branch of the New South Wales Department of Lands from the early 1880s, and after gaining a law degree, specialised in land issues. In December 1921 he was appointed as the first judge of the Land and Valuation Court. M. Dicker, 'Pike, George Herbert (1866- 1947)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pike-george-herbert-8049/text14039>, accessed 1 August 2011.

¹³ *SMH*, 7 September 1920, p. 9.

training hoping this would improve their chances of success. It is little wonder that inexperienced men, many with serious war-related disabilities and little training, soon failed as soldier settlers on these settlements.

However, in his report handed down in August 1921 Justice Street stated he had been relieved of his duty of enquiring into all other matters except 'charges either of actual dishonesty, or political corruption, or of negligence, or breach of duty of so serious a character as to amount to positive wrongdoing'.¹⁴ Justice Street noted in his findings there was great dissatisfaction among soldier settlers on group settlements, and believed they had just cause for their grievances. These complaints included poor and inferior building construction and products, the incurring of excessive costs for land clearing, and unnecessary administrative delays.¹⁵ However, the Street Royal Commission did not solve any problems for soldier settlers as their concerns lay outside his investigation. There is no surviving evidence to show whether soldier settlers' grievances as observed by Justice Street were subsequently addressed by the RSSB or the government. The pro-active efforts of the settlers' delegates appeared to prove worthless.

Less than a year after the Street Royal Commission, conditions on poultry farms on group soldier settlements had become so disturbing parliamentary members lobbied for government action arguing that, at least at Bankstown, the settlement was close to collapsing.¹⁶ Six months later, attempting to stave off continuing concerns about conditions on many soldier settlements members were told the government intended

¹⁴ NSWPP, Vol. 1, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 809.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 85, p. 2711, 22 December 1921.

to have a full inquiry and would soon make suitable proposals to parliament.¹⁷ Soldier settlers across the state were also active in calling for changes. In August 1922, a Soldier Settlers' Progress League was formed in Cootamundra, 250 miles south-west of Sydney.¹⁸ Representatives addressed meetings in other parts of the state in a bid to increase membership and gain support for their resolution for a public inquiry into all soldier settlements.¹⁹ The Soldier Settlers' Progress League also wanted soldier settlement administration removed from political control and placed under a board comprised of experienced farmers and businessmen.²⁰ Although soldier settlers were strongly advised to unite to demand action, it appears the lobby group had little success in remedying conditions.²¹

In August 1922, a Parliamentary Select Committee was appointed 'to inquire into and report upon the administration of, and conditions attaching to, soldier settlement in all its branches, with a view to adjusting grievances, and placing such settlement on a satisfactory basis'.²² However, after examining evidence the committee decided to confine their report only to the poultry group soldier settlements, noting conditions on these settlements were 'most unsatisfactory and growing steadily worse'.²³ No parliamentary action was taken to investigate soldier settlers' problems across the rest of the state.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. 86, 2-3 May 1922, pp. 153-154.

¹⁸ *SMH*, 9 August 1922, p. 13; The movement to form a separate Progress League to represent soldier settlers across the state may have come out of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League Congress the previous month, where concerns about problems with the scheme were listed on the agenda, *Smith's Weekly*, 22 July 1922, p. 27.

¹⁹ *SMH*, 22 August 1922, p. 9. Vice President W.R. Evans from Ooma Soldier Settlement, near Grenfell, and Secretary W.J. Sloper, addressed fifty soldier settlers at Bective, near Tamworth, 300 miles north of Sydney. A further meeting was called for Tamworth soldier settlers the following week.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *Smith's Weekly*, 2 September 1922, p. 27. Dalley's article was headlined 'Keep the Government to its Promise. Now's the Time, Soldier-Settlers. See That Reform is Made, Not Promised'.

²² NSWPP, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1 (2nd Session) 1922, Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Soldier Settlements, p. 291.

²³ *ibid.*

Deputy Leader and Minister for Lands Walter Wearne said in parliament he had no objection to an investigation into soldier settlements. Although Wearne had only held the portfolio for a few months, his Nationalist Party government had inherited soldier settlement problems from the previous Labor incumbents.²⁴ Explaining the enormous debt New South Wales carried because of additional funding it had provided for soldier settlement, Wearne revealed his concerns about the scheme's viability.

Speaking in the Legislative Assembly, he said

men without any knowledge of land settlement, without any experience of country life or conditions, broken in health, and without any aptitude for such a calling, were placed on areas of land, with a debt of thousands of pounds hanging over them. No evidence of thrift was demanded, and none was given. Without being called upon to contribute one shilling towards the capital cost of the holding, many inexperienced and unsuitable men were given possession, and expected to work their holdings, and provide a living for themselves and any family they might have.²⁵

Wearne's statement to the House identified many of the problems the state had now realised were inherent in its soldier settlement scheme. Although these problems focused on inexperienced men with little or no capital, and large debts due to inflated land prices immediately after the war, there was an acknowledgement that men had returned from war 'broken in health'. How returned men's impaired health affected their return to civilian life especially as soldier settlers, was not addressed either by the Minister or the investigating committee.

²⁴ www.parliament.nsw.gov.au, accessed 8 November 2010; Wearne became Minister in April 1922 under Nationalist Premier George Fuller.

²⁵ *SMH*, 24 August 1922, p. 9. The newspaper was reporting proceedings in the Legislative Assembly 23 August 1922. Wearne said of the total of 7,025 settled to date under soldier settlement, 1,371 were on group soldier settlements. The Commonwealth government had contributed £12,254,191 to New South Wales for soldier settlement, which had to be repaid by 1950. One of Wearne's plans to stabilise the scheme was to transfer soldier settlement administration back to the Lands Department, which would mean the abolition of the RSSB.

The Select Committee's report noted farms on the poultry group settlements were originally supplied with forty head of birds, and that settlers were expected to breed 600 birds from this original stock within two years. Experts had predicted 600 fowls would be sufficient to provide men with a good living. Few soldier settlers had been able to reach this figure, and as a result, egg production was well below predicted levels.²⁶ During evidence to the Select Committee, Poultry Expert James Hadlington explained that under the state's laws inexperienced returned men could not be prevented from becoming soldier settlers. An original provision in the 1916 *Soldier Settlement Bill* had allowed for a board to investigate men's suitability and experience, but this clause had been removed by the Legislative Council.²⁷ The Commonwealth government was unaware New South Wales allowed untrained returned men to become soldier settlers, although earlier reports by the state government had stated, specifically in regard to group settlements that 'before being placed in occupation of a block, however, the applicant has to satisfactorily demonstrate his industry, physical ability, and general suitability for the undertaking'.²⁸ A Department of Repatriation minute of July 1922 stated Senator Millen and the cabinet committee on land development agreed that only 'competent' men should receive land.²⁹ More than three years after the Armistice, the euphoria of compensating returned men for having volunteered to serve the nation and empire had faded. It had soon become clear, as outlined in Chapter Seven, that group soldier

²⁶NSWPP 1922, *op. cit.*, p. 291. The report was tabled in November 1922.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 301; Minister Wearne had also noted this anomaly in the legislation in parliament, as reported in *SMH*, 24 August, p. 9.

²⁸ National Archives of Australia: Repatriation Department; A2487, *Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1918-1929, 1919/5467*. Land Settlement – Details of State Governments measures and schemes. Other states also allowed untrained ex-servicemen to become soldier settlers, see for example, A. Richardson, 'The Long Road Home: Repatriation in Tasmania, 1916- 1929', PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2005, pp. 299-300.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 1923/1299, Soldier Land Settlement – New South Wales. 17 July 1922. The Commonwealth had assumed all states, including New South Wales, categorised applicants for soldier settlement under three classifications – (a) immediately eligible; (b) eligible after probationary training; (c) unsuited.

settlement schemes across Australia had major problems, and were not providing a comfortable and secure future ex-servicemen had been promised by a grateful nation.

In spite of Bankstown and Campbelltown settlers testifying that most settlers were trying hard to make their living working against heavy odds, reasons for the large numbers who had already forfeited were neither queried nor examined by the Select Committee. Robert Uebel representing Bankstown Progress Association said the settlement was bankrupt and about fifty men had left since he arrived in May 1917.³⁰ Why these men had forfeited was never investigated, although as this thesis has argued, most left because of poor health caused by war-related conditions. One newspaper which reviewed the Select Committee's findings said 'true, they knew nothing about poultry farming, but they were told with confidence and smiles that they need not worry – the Government had experts who made that business as easy as kissing your hand'.³¹ The article continued saying the men on these poultry settlements had no chance of success, to the extent that 'there are soldiers and their wives who never again wish to hear a hen cackle'.³² A year after this Report was tabled in parliament Minister Wearne said that after giving great thought to the recommendations he had decided he was unable to adopt the advise to reduce the farms' capital values.³³ The 1923 Report of the Department of Lands made no mention of the Select Committee Report, nor of any action relating to changes in soldier settlement.³⁴

³⁰ NSWPP 1922, Select Committee Report, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-304.

³¹ *The Argus*, 6 December 1922, p. 18.

³² *ibid.*

³³ New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 91, p. 26, 7 August 1923.

³⁴ NSWPP, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 1923, Report of the Department of Lands. The report noted that to 30 June 1923, 8,445 soldier settlers were settled in New South Wales. 1,292 had transferred or forfeited.

The New South Wales Labor government's plan to settle 500 returned men on poultry group soldier settlements did not materialise. This over-confidence is further reflected in forecasts that settlers would be making about £400 profit a year after four years. Authorities argued that repaying their debt 'should not involve hardship' as settlers would be growing vegetables, eating poultry from their own farms and being largely self-sufficient.³⁵ However, soldier settlers on these group settlements did not make profits. Many struggled simply to make ends meet and few made repayments against their debt. They were damaged men who tried unsuccessfully to support themselves and their families on a small farm. The ideals of co-operation appealed, but did not eventuate. What had seemed like a workable option, in reality was a disaster. It did not happen to just a few. By the Depression nearly 200 men had tried and failed on the six group settlements in the County of Cumberland.³⁶

Following a Premiers Conference in July 1927, Prime Minister Stanley Bruce appointed Justice George Pike of the Land and Valuation Court in Sydney to investigate soldier settlement across Australia.³⁷ The Prime Minister decided on an enquiry, believing a Royal Commission would be resented by the states and that 'friendly negotiations' should be maintained at all costs.³⁸ Justice Pike was given fifteen terms of reference and his findings were handed down in August 1929.³⁹

Taking nearly two years to complete the *Report on Losses Due to Soldier Settlement*

³⁵ SRNSW: NRS 8056 [19/7028] *op. cit.* The five page report is undated.

³⁶ see Appendix A.

³⁷ NAA: Prime Minister's Department; A458, *Correspondence files, multiple number series, second system, 1 January 1899-31 December 1939*, S394/2: Repatriation. Land Settlement. Investigation by Mr Justice Pike.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 29 November 1927.

³⁹ Pike, *Report on Losses, op. cit.*

focused on financial losses, noting that ‘losses of the magnitude that have arisen were never contemplated’ had resulted in Australia-wide losses in excess of £23 million.⁴⁰

Item No. 11 of Justice Pike’s terms of reference was to ‘inquire generally into the matter of those settlers who are regarded by the State authorities as unfit for land settlement by reason of their war disabilities’, and to assess their losses.⁴¹ It appears government bodies provided little information to Pike in this regard who stated that data was unreliable, ‘more particularly when the unfitness developed some time after the settler went into occupation, ... [especially] where men had been gassed’.⁴² Pike also found that ‘no records have been kept that would allow of any estimate being formed of the amount of financial loss due to unfit men being placed on the land’.⁴³ Although these findings lend some tacit weight to the argument that many returned men failed as soldier settlers because of war-related disabilities, it also proves state government bodies gave little or no credence to the effects of war on men’s ability to return to a useful civilian life.

Soon after Justice Pike handed down his report debate in the New South Wales parliament by the member for Cootamundra Kenneth Hoad, noted that the Minister for Lands had not informed the House if he agreed with the findings. Hoad wanted special consideration for soldier settlers burdened with heavy debts, especially as so many were affected by disabilities caused by their war service.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 6, p. 21 notes Victoria stated fifty-seven settlers were unsuited to soldier settlement because of their war disabilities. No figures for any other state are included in the report.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ NSWPD, *op. cit.*, Vol. 118, 24 October 1929, p. 777, ‘in view of the physical disabilities under which many of these men carry as a result of wounds sustained while on active service’. Six months later in March 1930, the Minister for Lands said only thirteen of the original thirty-six settlers remained

New South Wales and Commonwealth inquiries into soldier settlement appeared to have little impact on conditions for soldier settlers in this study. The focus of Commonwealth and state investigations centred on financial losses and the large debts soldier settlers had to carry. Many men may not have fully understood how much they owed the government, while others struggled to gain this information. Their burden of debt, entering an industry with no capital was unrealistically high. However, as has been argued throughout this thesis, it is an indication of men's desperation that they were willing to take over large debts from other soldier settlers who had failed before them, believing soldier settlement was their only viable option for earning a living post-war.

Conclusion

This thesis has revealed that plans to introduce a soldier settlement scheme post-World War I were popular both in the community and amongst politicians across Australia. It has shown that the budgets and costings to fund group settlement in New South Wales were underestimated by both Commonwealth and state governments, causing returned men in the County of Cumberland group settlements to have large debts they could not discharge. It has argued that plans for men partially disabled as a result of war service were inadequate, leaving these men often unemployable in civilian life. The thesis has shown governments never acknowledged the effects, both short-term and long-term, of the physical and psychological injuries sustained by troops during the war as shown by their responses to soldier settlers in this study.

at Hillview and fifteen of the original thirty-two remained at Chipping Norton, NSWPD, Vol. 121, 25 March 1930, p. 4030.

There were six group soldier settlements established during and after World War I in the County of Cumberland at Bankstown, Seven Hills, Chipping Norton, Campbelltown, Lurnea and Doonside. Early in the twentieth century, as this thesis showed in Chapter Four, these areas were largely rural with small populations supported by little or poor infrastructure. The addition of nearly 200 small farms and the resultant increase in local populations created demands for both new and improved services such as schools, roads, electricity and access to town water supplies. This thesis has argued that the development of these six group soldier settlements impacted on the expansion of Sydney's greater metropolitan area in the period between the two world wars. The community activities outlined in Chapter Five begun and promoted by soldier settlement members contributed socially, politically and economically to the region's growth. Future research into the growth and development of the greater Sydney area in the twentieth century by historical geographers, town planners and historians will benefit from the current research into group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland. The history of the soldier settlement scheme post-World War I in New South Wales still contains many gaps. Further research into other group settlements across the state in rural areas will hopefully provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these returned men coped with civilian life as farmers, and whether their failure and forfeiture rates were lower than those on the settlements in this study. The current research's findings will present valuable background material for comparative studies of group soldier settlement in Australia and other English-speaking countries, leading to a better understanding of how returned men survived the peace.

This thesis has revealed that within a few years group soldier settlement in the County of Cumberland in New South Wales had major problems with many returned men all too aware they had 'sowed the seeds of hope and reaped the harvest of despair'.⁴⁵ This statement neatly summarises what happened to the group soldier settlers at Bankstown, Grantham, Chipping Norton, Campbelltown, Hillview and Doonside. They had been confidently told by state and Commonwealth governments that the soldier settlement scheme would see them comfortably settled on land of their own with little risk. It was promoted as an innovative plan for inexperienced men and supported by government, fulfilling their promises to make special provisions for returned men after the war. This thesis has shown that former Prime Minister Chris Watson and New South Wales Labor Premier William Holman promoted 1890s village settlements for the unemployed, garden cities like Daceyville across the state, and the utopian communal settlement of New Australia in Paraguay. Determined to help build a new world post-World War I and to introduce social reform to improve the lives of working men, they were key architects in a similar land repatriation scheme to place ex-servicemen on the land under the tenure of group soldier settlement in New South Wales.

Their idealism was not realised. Within a few short years, hope dissipated for many soldier settlers. Instead of being the vehicle to ease their return to civilian life, soldier settlement became a millstone around their necks that left settlers across Australia broken in spirit and body. Soldier settlers on the six group settlements in the County of Cumberland were no different. This thesis has shown that a significant number of returned men on these group settlements did not succeed because of their war-related

⁴⁵ *Smith's Weekly*, 25 June 1921, p. 23.

physical and psychological injuries. Mostly unskilled men who had relied on their physical fitness and strength before the war to support themselves, they returned to Australia without this vital attribute. It is probable that more men came and left these settlements than in other tenures in country New South Wales. Inexperienced, without capital, requiring on-going medical treatment in Sydney or in poor health, they chose this type of soldier settlement as a last resort knowing their former employment was closed to them and their options limited. Most were married or married soon after discharge, and had to find a means to support themselves and their family. A small poultry or market garden plot with a new house, with other returned men working under the supervision of an experienced farmer and manager seemed promising. They soon found out it would never work. Rather than being restorative, many found their disabilities increased with age and they could not manage the long hours of physical labour required to work even a small acreage. This thesis has argued they were unsuited to become soldier settlers because of their injuries and disabilities. It has also argued that these group soldier settlements became a refuge for war-damaged men, and by default a government unemployment scheme for ex-servicemen who were unfit for any employment. This thesis has also addressed a gap in Australian history between the two world wars, by revealing some of the effects World War I had on Australian society, providing an insight into the post-war lives of veterans scarred by war. Further research across Australia into the success or failure of soldier settlers on different land tenures will provide vital information for comparison with the findings of this study. It will also provide descendants of World War I servicemen and women with a picture of civilian life for many soldier settler families, revealing that failure and poor mental and physical health was not an isolated occurrence. Whether the

findings of this study are a microcosm of soldier settlers across the state and across Australia will only be made known after more research into the subject.

Many factors impacted upon the hoped-for success of soldier settlers. One common feature not previously identified in other studies of soldier settlement to date is how war injuries continued to affect returned men's civilian lives in the post-war period. Many men on the group settlements in the County of Cumberland suffered from psychological and physical conditions not mentioned in their service files. For numerous ex-servicemen in this study, the only permanent work they had post-war was their tenure on a group soldier settlement. Many never received pensions for their disabilities as medical officers refused to accept their conditions were war-related. The remainder of their civilian life was impaired and often shattered by their war experiences.

When agreement was reached between the Commonwealth and state governments to establish a land settlement scheme for returned men and women after World War I, no predictions could be made about the physical and mental health of members of the AIF when they returned home. Even more difficult to predict was how disabilities would present in ten, twenty or thirty years. Additionally, as a 1924 Royal Commission pointed out, Australian repatriation authorities were hampered by the lack of specific records about soldiers' health at discharge.⁴⁶ This study has shown that disabilities and injuries suffered during World War I had a much greater impact post-war on returned men, specifically soldier settlers, than has previously been thought.

⁴⁶ A.G. Butler, *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services 1914-1918. Vol. 3. Special Problems and Services*. 1st edn, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1943. Chapter XVI The War Damaged Soldier, p. 804.

This thesis has argued that many men on group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland returned to Australia too war-disabled to return to their former occupations. Soldier settlement on small blocks of land close to urban infrastructure was promoted as viable, even for men with disabilities. They had few other options open to them. As clearly shown in 'Hope', the men on the six group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland initially worked hard to make a success of their new lives and build strong community networks to provide a good life for their families. It could not last. Men were forced to forfeit, unable to continue because of their health. Many left without work or another home to go to. The financial loss to the nation with the failure of soldier settlement after World War I as noted in the 1929 Pike Report was high. This thesis has revealed that the real costs in impaired health, both physical and psychological, was even higher. The stigma of failure for large numbers of men on the group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland was not of their making. For many returned men on these group soldier settlements, the shadows of the Great War lingered for a lifetime.