

**Shadows of the Great War.
Group Soldier Settlement in Greater Sydney, 1917-1939**

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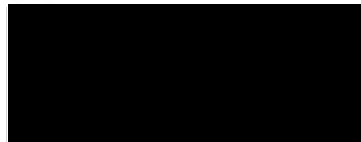
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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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ABSTRACT

The Australian Soldier Settlement Scheme was part of state and Commonwealth governments' repatriation plans to assist returned men become farmers after the Great War. In New South Wales about 9,000 men including a small number of women became soldier settlers under this scheme.

One of the tenures promoted by the New South Wales government was group settlement. In the County of Cumberland, the greater Sydney area, six group soldier settlements were established between 1917 and 1920. All were small acreage, largely planned as poultry farms, with some viticulture and market garden blocks. Group settlement was promoted as suitable for men with no capital, little farming experience or those with war-related injuries. Seen as a fitting reward for service to their country, a small soldier settlement farm was an opportunity for many men to become a landowner.

This thesis provides a re-evaluation of the significance of group soldier settlement, linking it to earlier utopian ideals of communal living. It argues Labor politicians, notably Chris Watson and William Holman, promoted these ideals believing they would improve working men's lives. Planned to benefit both the state's economy and the ex-serviceman, this thesis argues group soldier settlement was a realistic way to settle large numbers of inexperienced men under supervision in a state that had little available Crown lands. It recognises government planners had little concept of the impact war-related injuries would have when ex-servicemen returned to civilian life, but argues plans for partially disabled men were inadequate post-war.

However, this thesis argues group soldier settlement was a chimera. More than 350 tried on these settlements, but few lasted. Soldier settlers on these group settlements were destined to fail largely due to their war-related physical and psychological disabilities. Pre-war most had relied on their physical strength and fitness working as unskilled labourers for a living. The war robbed them of their health, and gave the men few options. Following discharge they needed to find permanent work to support themselves with dignity. Group soldier settlement therefore seemed a practical option,

close to the on-going medical treatment many required. A war pension was never a living wage to support a man and his family.

Governments were confident group settlement would work – it did not. Forced to leave because of their health, many of these soldier settlers never worked again. For returned men on the group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland, the shadows of the Great War lasted a lifetime.

With Thanks

The history of soldier settlement after World War I has still not been fully told. Spanning the years between the Great War and World War II, it is a part of Australian history that affected many thousands of Australians, but has largely been forgotten in history. My interest peaked after learning that my maternal grandfather was a soldier settler in the far west of New South Wales. Little did I realise when I began researching that it would be such a complicated and all too frequently depressing history.

This research belongs to the blokes on the six group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland. To their descendants who helped bring this work to life by sharing family memories – Elizabeth Beckett, Bob Anson, Stan Coles, Jack and Lill Hopher, Bruce Maidan, Dorothy Maidan, Ray Norton, George Norton, Stephen Norton, Neville Hall, Ken Philips, Kay Derome and Tony Steele – thank you.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIF	Australian Imperial Force
HAC	Hawkesbury Agricultural College
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NSWPD	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
NSWPP	New South Wales Parliamentary Papers
RSSB	Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch
RSSILA	Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia
SRNSW	State Records of New South Wales