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'Proof of Gratitude? ¹⁴¹₆₀₅₉
Soldier Land Settlement in New Zealand
After World War I'

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
at Massey University.

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1992

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of soldier land settlement in New Zealand after World War I. Entrenched in New Zealand folklore and historiography is the belief that the majority of soldier settlers failed and walked off their farms. This thesis, however, questions this orthodoxy and presents evidence showing that significant aspects of the soldier settlers' story have, for ideological and political reasons, been misunderstood and misrepresented by later writers who have been blinkered to the achievements of the Reform Government. Closely tied to this traditional notion of failure are assumptions about the high cost and poor quality of land involved, and the inexperience and under-capitalisation of the settlers. This study pays particular attention to the development and implementation of government policy. It shows that land purchase and its distribution, and on-going support for settlers by the Government, were based on more sophisticated and discerning policies than later writers have allowed. This study examines the expectations of the primary parties in the settlement process and shows how these expectations were both perceived and presented in the media as unfulfilled. More soldiers survived on their farms than is generally recognised. This was the result of deliberate government policy in response to uncertain economic conditions during the interwar period. This survival rate was not without cost, both in economic terms for the Crown, and in personal terms for the participating soldiers. The farming experience of the interwar period was not as the soldiers expected - faced as they were with a loss of individual freedom and the development of financial dependency. The dominating image to have survived in the historical orthodoxy is that the soldiers were betrayed. This was based upon the strength of their moral claims to recognition and recompense from the community which they had defended. However, this thesis argues that any betrayal was actually of the Arcadian expectations with which the soldiers had returned to New Zealand, and of the heady expectations that the community initially had of the soldiers. These hopes and ideals, it is suggested, proved to be irreconcilable with contemporary political and economic realities. The perceived experience of the soldiers nevertheless assured them their status as victims.

"Get back on the land". That was the slogan which greeted the soldier on his return to New Zealand. The Government made obedience easy and the soldier obeyed with a gratifying enthusiasm. Most likely he was impelled by the bright prospects of prosperity and of a desire for a continuation of the open life.

Quick March, 10 January 1922, p.30.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJHR</i>	Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives.
L&S	Department of Lands and Survey.
NA	The National Archives of New Zealand.
<i>NZPD</i>	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.
RSA	New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association.
WTU	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my supervisors, Professor Barrie Macdonald and Professor Kerry Howe, for their kind and very patient help and concern over the past three and a half years. I owe a special debt to Basil Poff, David Thomson, and James Watson for their interest and their more than valuable comments upon aspects of this study. Their willingness to put up with interruptions to their own busy work load will not be forgotten. I would also like to thank Norman Austin for his famous wit and constant support. Thanks to William Broughton who revealed the finer nuances of interwar New Zealand fiction. I owe a vote of thanks to Professor Colin Davis, formerly of Massey University, and now Professor of English History at the University of East Anglia, and Professor Bill Ellis, a 1989 Fulbright Scholar from the University of East Kentucky. Rama McGee and Pamela Kenworthy of the Department of History have been unfailingly supportive with word processing advice and kind comments. I owe a particular debt to Dr N. Waters, Vice Chancellor of Massey University, for providing funds which have allowed this study to be completed, and to Professor Glennis Cropp, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, who assisted with funds that allowed me to air some of the ideas contained in this thesis at a conference in Australia in 1990. Thanks also to the staff of Massey University Library. Many thanks to all of my fellow graduate students of the last five years for sharing the trials and tribulations of historical research, particularly the 'old firm' of Astrid Baker, Jan Rogers, Gaynor Whyte, Lucy Marsden, and Danny Keenan.

In Wellington I wish to thank the Historical Branch of Internal Affairs, for a 1989 study award which has helped fund this study, for assistance I received from the Branch to travel to the Australian conference, and for personal advice and encouragement. Thanks to my fellow travellers through the New Zealand story of World War I: Nicholas Boyack, Christopher Pugsley, Jan Rogers, and Jane Tolerton. The reference staff of National Archives were unfailingly helpful during the time I spent there. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the staff of Turnbull library, Phil Garretty at Defence Headquarters, and the staff of the New Zealand Returned Servicemens' Association in Wellington.

Thanks to all my friends who have provided support over the years and a final, but most special thanks to my parents Neville and Beverly, and my sister and brother-in-law Lynley and Gary for all their assistance during my years of study.