

Research Article

Failure deconstructed: Histories and geographies of soldier settlement in New Zealand circa 1917–39

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Abstract: The New Zealand discharged soldier settlement scheme of the 1920s has been much criticized as being a failure. This paper draws on the existing literature and new case study research to break open ‘failure’ as an undifferentiated term and proposes that it was of three different types relating to what was termed the ‘personal equation’, to debt levels and to broader structural adjustment problems in farming. Each operated at differing scales. This is incorporated into a typology of failure and is put forward as basis for further research.

Key words: mortgage adjustment, New Zealand, soldier settlement.

Much rebuked at the time and generally strongly criticized in the subsequent mainstream historical accounts of New Zealand, the discharged soldier settlement scheme¹ of the 1920s has in recent years been cautiously reassessed (Gould 1992a, 2000; Roche 2002). This rehabilitation builds on earlier unpublished post-graduate research in history (Maloney 1982; Ojinmah 1987; Gould 1992b; Dunne 1993) and, to a lesser extent, geography (Shanks 1983), which largely via a case study approach threw doubts on the unequivocal labelling of the scheme as a failure. Something similar is discernible in Australia where there were matching land settlement schemes. Recently, Johnson (2005), in considering the fate of Queensland’s soldier pineapple farmers, has added a further layer to the Australian discussion by offering a counterargument that again gave prominence to the failures of the scheme. A similar rejoinder has not been made for the New Zealand situation, and it is not intended at this juncture to try and present

such a case. Rather, the objective of this paper is to consider further the nature of ‘failure’ by drawing particularly on case study work from soldier settlements in Canterbury and Wellington. Johnson (2005) considered that part of the difficulty in Australia was that Justice Pike’s Commission into soldier settlement defined soldier settlers too broadly. In essence the more inclusive the settler category, the less discerning it is for highlighting the specific features of the failure of soldier settlement. This has significance in the New Zealand setting where it is important to be clear about who are soldier settlers and what constituted a soldier settlement. This is not a situation unique to New Zealand and Australia, for similar schemes were developed in Canada, Britain and even in Kenya (for men with ‘officerly qualities’) (Duder 1992; Lockwood 1998; Fedorowich 2002).

Historian Miles Fairburn (1996, p. 205) described the soldier settlement scheme as ‘one of the greatest disasters in social planning

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Table 1 Leases forfeited under discharged soldiers settlement act 1915–22

Land district	Number of leases forfeited	Area (acres)	Average area of lease (acres)	Total rent lost (£)	Average rent lost (£)
North Auckland	26	4 569	175.7	500	19.2
Auckland	118	21 967	186.2	6 654	56.4
Hawke's Bay	17	5 219	307	977	57.5
Taranaki	12	2 104	175.3	802	66.8
Wellington	95	13 775	145	7 581	79.8
Marlborough	6	2 494	415.7	91	15.2
Nelson	2	1 955	977.5	199	99.5
Westland	–	–	–	–	–
Canterbury	9	1 567	174.1	863	95.9
Otago	15	3 956	263.7	309	20.6
Southland	5	932	186.4	10	2
New Zealand	305	58 538	192	17 986	59

AJHR 1922, C9, p. 21.

that New Zealand has ever known'. Brooking (2004) was more circumspect writing of failure as well as success stories but in that order, so that there is an implication that failure predominates. What is being referred to here is a settlement scheme for returned soldiers involving over 4000 land applications totalling 1.4 million acres that offered access to land by ballot on a free-hold or lease-hold basis as well as other loan money. A lack of suitable Crown Lands induced the government to amend the original 1915 legislation in 1917 under section two of which returned soldiers could now borrow money to purchase farms on the open market. Older histories of New Zealand from Condliffe (1930) to Sinclair (1959) tended to cover the scheme in some detail, while more recent interpreters, who have moved away from giving a central place to political and economic themes, such as Mein Smith (2005) and King (2003), have tended to omit all mention of it.

The national assessment of Gould (1992a) and regional inventory of Powell (1971) have been complemented by a number of case studies, particularly of Otago soldier settlements, such as Clifton and Benmore (Maloney 1982), Gladbrook (Ojinnmah 1987) and Teviot (Shanks 1983). The number of soldier settlers applying for rent adjustments in 1923 has been widely taken as an indicator of the success or failure of the scheme at that time (e.g. Powell 1971). In Canterbury Land District, the number

of applications was very low so that the scheme might be characterized as successful in that region. Wellington Land District, in contrast, had a very high number of applications for adjustments, suggesting the scheme was in difficulty. The distribution of forfeited leases supports this interpretation (Table 1).

The present paper mixes a micro-level approach, drawn from detailed case studies of a group of half a dozen primarily dairy farm settlements in the Manawatu, and another group of half a dozen mainly mixed farm settlements in Mid Canterbury, with regional-level official sources, and national-level statistical data. These two groups of settlements are from contrasting regions: relatively successful vs. relatively unsuccessful; mixed farming vs. dairy farming operations. They include farm settlements for which both the district and head office collections of Lands Departments files in Archives New Zealand are relatively complete and are adjacent to Palmerston North and Ashburton from which it was possible to visit the field sites. As such they do not overlap with the larger lease-hold sheep farming properties described by Otago researchers, nor do they mimic the pervasive and enduring image of the bush farming aspect of the scheme emphasized by Cumberland (1981). While generalizations are being made cautiously, there is sufficient depth to the case studies to suggest that ideas of 'failure' can be usefully explored at this juncture in time.²

Historians' studies of soldier settlement that consider people and land in different localities have an implicitly acknowledged geography, albeit that soldier settlers as much as settlements have been kept to the fore. Mindful of how historians have paid attention to geography in their accounts, as a geographer in this paper I would like to emphasize that geographies of soldier settlement also have histories. This leads on to the notion that there may be distinctive temporal episodes or 'types' of farm failure. It is the idea of 'types' of farm failure that are explored in the remainder of the present paper.

Dissecting 'farm failure'

Period criticism of soldier settlement as government encouragement of land speculation was notably and influentially stated by economic historian J. B. Condliffe in 1930. It is noteworthy that his '22 585 new purchasers armed with £22 627 864 of borrowed money' used the broadest possible definition of soldier settler and also included urban house purchases (Condliffe 1930, p. 224). Conversely Gould (1992, p. 117) observed that the section two farms purchased by individual soldiers 'were not in the true sense soldier settlements' and that 'Lands Boards could exercise the least supervisor control over these properties'. The difference between the narrowest definition of soldier settlement, which is restricted to blocks of land already owned or purchased by the Crown to be subdivided and sold or leased to discharged soldiers, and the most expansive that includes these as well as the section two purchases of free-hold land with government loans, is considerable. By 1924 officials put the number of loans at 4845 for soldiers on Crown Lands³ and 5498 for section two farm purchases (Under Secretary to Minister of Lands, n.d., LS 36/24).⁴ In addition, most of the surviving farm-level archival material is related only to the properties on Crown Land and not the section two farms. For this paper, a more circumscribed definition of 'soldier settlement' as farms on Crown lands is used, although it is acknowledged that the scheme as a whole cannot be understood without considering the section two farms.

The term farm 'failure' features in the Lands Board's responses to the Dominion Revaluation

Commission Report of 1923, but a term that had more currency in the 1920s and 1930s was 'walking off'. A dairy farmer settler from Kairanga Soldier Settlement near Palmerston North expressed this sentiment well as early as 1923 when he remarked to officials 'I was in for another position – just missed it. If it had been successful I certainly would have walked off. I am absolutely full up of this and will certainly turn it in if I can see anything better' (Knight to Commissioner, 1923, LS 1/26/8207). Rewi Alley, one of the most notable section two soldier settlers because of his subsequent accomplishments in China, farmed for 6 years in partnership on a 600-acre farm in the Moeawatea Valley inland from Waverly in Taranaki. As wool prices fell the farm was no longer able to support two men. Alley (1954, p. 16) recounts, 'I withdrew. Others stayed on – but they now have gone too'. Just as some New Zealand politicians saw the bush as the new battle front, Alley used military parlance to describe his actions – 'a withdrawal', a deliberate falling back to a better position. He did not describe himself as having failed suggesting, retrospectively, that the experience gave him greater strength for trials ahead in China. One biographer remarked that 'It was not a case of defeat by the difficult challenging, physical environment to which it was a joy to give battle, but a frustration by the vagaries of the market on which the New Zealand way of life had come to depend' (Airey 1970, p. 42).

Types of failure

Failure has tended to be the label and judgement that has been applied to the scheme. 'Failure', however, has many dimensions, some, to use the phrase of the Dominion Revaluation Board, related to the 'personal equation', others rested on the mechanics of the Discharged Soldier settlement legislation and its administration, and finally there was the impact of external economic conditions. The task here is to tease these apart.

From 1918 to 1938 the export-specialized New Zealand economy faced difficult times. The end of the war-time bulk purchasing agreements with the British Government in 1920–21 produced a short sharp depression and export prices fluctuated throughout the

remainder of the 1920s before the impact of Great Depression of 1929 was felt. Conditions were at their worst around 1932 and gradually improved thereafter. It is against this backdrop that the failure of soldier farm settlement ought to be assessed. I would suggest there are three distinctive episodes of farm failure.

'Type one' failures to 1923: A failure of character

This 'type' takes in the growth phase of the settlement scheme up to the establishment of the Dominion Revaluation Board in 1923 to which soldier settlers could apply for a reduction in the capital value of their land and hence their rentals. The earliest soldier settlers in many cases were undercapitalized, in some cases were handicapped by recent wounds or illness, and further disadvantaged in other instances by a lack of farming experience. The Lands rangers inspecting settlements typically identified these men as poor farmers hampered by their injuries and lacking in energy. The economic and environmental limitations of the properties were not necessarily evident at this time. The ranger's 1920 report for Makowai, a 25-farm 1100-acre dairy settlement in the Manawatu, was scathing in this respect: 'some of the holders have no serious intentions of meeting their financial obligations and are living in too close a vicinity to the Sanson Hotel' (Ranger to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 29 January 1920, LS 1 21/30). The ranger proceeded to section three and found that 'although this gentleman is subject to a Prohibition Order he was in a state of intoxication'. Returning later in the day the ranger found him asleep 'but fortunately was able to persuade him to milk his cows. This man is £175 in arrears with his rent, which I suggest he be called on to find within 14 days, or forfeit his interest in the holding' (Ranger to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 29 January 1920, LS 1 21/30). An adjoining settler the ranger also found 'under the influence of liquor but milking his cows' and formed the opinion that 'he will never make a successful farmer'. This judgement was, however, not borne out if persistence is the measure; the settler survived to purchase the free-hold of the property in 1940 (LS-W 73/2).

These views of soldier settlers are revealing in several ways. While it was acknowledged by the Minister that it was 'the duty of the government to help the men' (Guthrie to delegation, 28 June 1918, LS 1 21/30), there was moral criticism of their behaviour on the farm. With the benefit of hindsight it is also easier to see heavy drinking as a means of dulling the memory of still recent wartime traumas.⁵ There was also the suggestion that some men were not serious in their intention to become farmers as is evident in the ranger's report that: 'though I have visited the section on numerous occasions I have never discovered the tenant with his coat off' (Ranger to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 29 January 1920, LS 1 21/30). Even though some of the settlers complained about the small size of their sections, this was not officially recognized as being of real importance at this time.

Those who did leave up to 1923 might be regarded as 'type one' failures, largely settlers who were unable to survive the 1921 price falls. The attributes of the individual farm settlers contributed to official assessments of success or failure. Departmental files and registers track applications, allocations, monies loaned and owed as well as total acres so that it is difficult to unequivocally answer even apparently simple questions about numbers of settlers and farms.

A rare quantitative snap shot of 'failure' exists for 1921 and 1922 in information on the number and area of leases forfeited (AJHR 1921, C9A, p. 2; 1922, C9, p. 21). To 1922 some 305 leases were forfeited (the lease was lost because of falling behind in payments). Some 39% of forfeitures were in Auckland Land District by number, 39% by area and 37% by amount of rent lost (Table 1). Wellington was the other district in difficulty with 31% of the leases forfeited amounting to 24% of the national area and 42% of the losses. When the number of leases forfeited is expressed as a percentage of the total number of soldier settlement leases in 1922, Auckland (18.4%) and Wellington Land Districts (14.6%) stand out. Auckland was also ranked first for percentage of area of forfeited leases (18.9%) and value of rents lost (16.8%). For Wellington the area and rent losses dropped away amounting to 8% for both. Canterbury, at the other end of the spectrum, had forfeited only 2.9% of

leases, less than 1% of their area and 1.8% of the rents. An indicator of the difficulties faced in the Auckland Land District is found in the 17 leases out of a national total of 39 that were forfeited from August 1921 to March 1922, amounting to some 3375 acres at a loss of £1156 representing increases by Land District of 17%, 18% and 31% in number, in area and rents lost, respectively.

In 1924, the Lands Department considered that out of 4845 soldier farms on Crown land since the inception of the Scheme, 201 (4.1%) had been surrendered and 324 (6.7%) had been forfeited while 610 (11.1%) of the 5498 section two farms had been abandoned (Under Secretary to Minister of Lands, n.d., LS 36/24).⁶ This gives a sense of scale to the type one failures, one that is perhaps somewhat less in numerical and percentage terms than the mythologies admit, particularly when it is appreciated that many of the abandoned farmers were reoccupied by other discharged soldiers prepared to accept the challenge or became incorporated into adjacent soldier settler properties.

'Walking off' also does not provide a completely reliable guide for labelling a farmer a failure. For instance, the Canterbury Lands Board accepted the surrender of G. L. Taylor's lease on McGregor Settlement because of his wife's poor health (Canterbury Lands Board Minutes 6 June 1918, CAAR, p. 23). B. F. Dalton departed from Kairanga Soldier settlement near Palmerston North within a matter of months of taking it up, but on further examination his actions can be seen as a rational economic decision. The Department had been slow in authorizing financial approvals for stock and other items so that it was not possible to be ready for the coming dairy season and rather than have no income for 12 months, Dalton decided to withdraw and try elsewhere next year. Parenthetically it is worth noting that some were tempted but did not succumb to the opportunity to acquire a farm on easy terms. These individuals included Bernard Ashwin, subsequently Secretary of Treasury (1939–55), who later recalled that it was an opportunity he 'was glad to have turned down' (Easton 2001, p. 44).

The reports of the Dominion Revaluation Board provide a further picture of the type

one failures. They reported that of 4332 farms 50.6% were successful, 30.7% were temporarily unsuccessful and that 18.7% unsuccessful (AJHR 1923 C9A, p. 41). Interestingly the various Lands Boards did not necessarily agree with the Dominion Revaluation Board. For instance the Auckland Lands Board emphasized that in a 'great majority of the cases failure has been due in a very considerable degree to impaired physical or mental vitality as the result of war service which has rendered it impossible for the settlers to overcome difficulties' arising from a lack of farming experience (AJHR 1923 C9A, p. 45). The North Auckland board suggested that problems were inevitable:

In considering and determining whether the soldier farmers have been a success or a failure, it should be borne in mind that it could never have been expected that a large number of men commencing farming operations could reasonably expect to get into 'easy street' in three or four years. If this was possible every one would be farming. The real question to be determined is whether these men have a fairly good prospect of ultimately 'making good'. (AJHR, C9A 1923, 41)

That this first phase of the soldier settlement scheme would have its share of failures was acknowledged in various quarters. Prime Minister Massey himself had remarked that 'everyman is not cut out for the life of a farmer' (NZPD 1917 vol. 181, p. 34) while the Crown Lands Commissioner for Southland took the view that 'Failures there have been and will be' (AJHR 1922, C9, p. 16). What characterized this first episode of failure was a tendency for officials to initially see it as residing in the shortcomings of the settlers rather than in problems to do with the subdivision of farms into uneconomic units with limited capacity to increase production to offset falling export prices while rents remained high.

'Type two' failures 1924–28: Failure of the farms

A second phase of soldier settlement took place from 1924 to 1929. The main focus during this

period was not on quickly planting a huge number on the land but on keeping those who remained in place farming. This suggests that the nature of failure had also changed. The chair of the Dominion Revaluation Board noted in 1925 that, ‘chances of success of the soldier settlers have been substantially improved: but it is inevitable owing to the personal equation, that certain men will drop out from time to time’ (AJHR 1925, C9, p. 3). But many farms were undersized and uneconomic properties, some with significant environmental limitations. This made the ‘human cost’ of farming them considerable throughout the 1920s.

The focus of failure in this second era of the scheme was on farm units and not settlers. Departure from the farms was now triggered by arrears of rent, inability to service interest on current accounts, and other debts. Some farmers took the opportunity to exit after a decade being no longer tied by the provisions of the legislation to remain. By persisting in the face of adversity, settlers were, however, giving the appearance of success to the scheme at the expense of their own well-being. Alley (1954, p. 16) wrote that ‘my partner starved of the things he needed, lost his youth, and became more and more bitter ... the little feuds with the neighbours grew – each individual on his own hills and valleys, too big for him to cope with. Each a rugged individualist, hoping to do better than the other man, to the extent that he hardly liked to see him.’ His ideological position is apparent in these latter remarks, but examples of pooling labour and sharing machinery can be found on other settlements, so Alley’s comments about the rougher sheep country should not be overgeneralized.

The obvious type two failures were those who left in the mid to late 1920s in response to accumulated debt on uneconomic properties in the face of external price falls. Macdonald and Thompson (1985, p. 247) observed that walking off was ‘much more a feature of the 1920s than the 1930s. In both periods most of those who walked off were Crown settlers or tenants, usually returned servicemen who were doomed by a combination of land purchased at grossly inflated land values, farm units that were too small to be viable, and fluctuating prices.’ The less obvious ‘victims’ of the type two failure, however, were those who stayed

on the farm at a cost, propped up by various state interventions in the terms of rent remissions, postponements and writing off of some debts.

The Kairanga settlement near Palmerston North comprising a dozen 30-acre dairy farms provided a window into the privation necessary to make the scheme succeed. Applications to the Dominion Revaluation Board for 1924 showed that farm expenditure for Kairanga was typically £100 in excess of receipts with the latter varying from £350 to £652. As part of the revaluation exercise the Board provided its own estimates of future receipts, typically reducing farmer figures by 10% but slashing farm expenditures by one-third down to £200 from £300 per annum to achieve notional surpluses of £100–£200.⁷ These farmers survived but as little more than tenants for many years.

Revaluation was the other strategy open to the Government. In the case of Isleworth, a mixed farming settlement in Canterbury, most of the settlers were burdened with excessive amounts of debt and the downward adjustment in capital value sizable (Table 2). Those who fared better in this process were the farmers who were able to enlarge their holdings by the amalgamation of adjacent uneconomic units.

How did farmers respond to these circumstances? Some became exceedingly risk adverse.⁸ Others tried to minimize expenditure while bringing in off-farm income. R. J. Giles who took over section five of 63 acres at the Makowai Settlement in 1921, estimated his receipts for 1924 at £375 against expenses of £545. He noted that ‘for five months Mrs Giles has been cycling 5 miles to Rongotea relieving on the Rongotea School staff – I have been snatching all the jobs that come my way otherwise affairs would have been in a worse state’ (Dominion Revaluation Board, 29 January 1924, LS 1 26/21589).

Type three failure: Failure of the international economy

After 1930 there were only small numbers of new entrants, 10 applications with 8 being granted in 1934 (AJHR 1934, C9, p. 2). Numbers continued to leave and some of those who stayed did so under difficult circumstances. The prime cause of departure resulted from a

Table 2 Isleworth soldier settlement Canterbury: capital value and debt in 1928

Section	Capital value (£)	Reduction in capital value (£)	Arrears to 30 June 1928 (£)	Remissions (£)	Postponements (£)	Outstanding principle on current account (£)
3	3350	790	14	29	–	528
5	3640	1340	390	390	344	606
6	1470	760	335	335	81	771
7	2655	1060	44	44	262	665
8	2970	1030	50	150	241	1020
9	2725	1370	–	–	53	101
10	2830	1270	–	–	184	258
12	2670	1100	–	–	275	879
13	2535	50	55	147	165	680
RL 747	3260	–	–	75	–	–

Note: the occupier of RL 747 had only taken over the lease in April of 1927.

Source: CH 158 Isleworth 4/91 Vol. II 1921–32.

systemic failure of the international trading system triggered by the Great Depression. The impact in New Zealand was probably greatest in 1932 and 1933 with a slow recovery thereafter. From 1915 to 1933 there had been 4071 ‘allotments’ under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act amounting to 1 432 690 acres ‘but the processes of sale, forfeiture and abandonment’ had, by 1933, ‘reduced the number of holdings to 2727 and the area to 943 551 acres’ (Williams 1936, p. 126).

State responses to the difficulties faced by soldier settlers during and after the Depression included recourse to the rent adjustment and land revaluation strategies of previous years as well as an active amalgamation programme to create a smaller number of economic farm units on the various settlements. Significantly these were not restricted to the soldier settlers but were now subsumed within a number of initiatives that applied to the agricultural sector as whole. After the Labour government came to power in 1935 there was also some greater concerted intervention in the sector in the form of the guaranteed price schemes for dairy farmers, a concerted effort to adjust farm debt through the Mortgagors and Lessees Rehabilitation Act 1936, and establishment of a State Advances Department to provide finance for farm (and home) loans.

On Isleworth Settlement in Canterbury, for instance, James Murdoch who farmed 132 acres was one who appealed under the Mortgagors and Lessees Rehabilitation Act for the

revaluation of his property in 1937. That year his receipts of £587 exceeded expenditure by £98 but he had significant debts including £83 arrears on his rent, £214 arrears on his building loan as well as £177 on his State Advances first mortgage and a State Advances current account deficit of £359. In the view of the Revaluation Committee the farm was uneconomic and required the addition of at least a further 100 acres as well as quitting of the small dairy herd in favour of sheep to be viable. They had recommended a 23% reduction from the 1930 capital value figure of £3190 to £2460. This would bring the rent from £114 to £79. Murdoch contested this on the grounds of the even lower capital value figure of £1760 provided by his own valuer. The Adjustment Commission settled on a valuation of £2146 but kept the rent at £79 while instigating a significant restructuring of debts to be repaid over a 20-year period (LS 1 26/19852).

Soldier settlements were the subject of vigorous Lands Department schemes to create smaller numbers of economic farms by a process of amalgamation. Older settlers in their 50s and 60s were willing to leave with some cash in hand. On Isleworth settlement the Lands Department in 1939 reduced 10 farms down to 6 in order to create economic units in recognition of the problems stemming from areas of both light and very heavy land, needing drainage, within the settlement. The remaining farms were increased by areas of 20 to over 100 acres in order to create farms of 170–292

acres and the affected occupiers were offered payments in the order of £200–£400 in order to vacate their leases (Isleworth Settlement Amalgamation Proposals, 1939, CH 134 4/91). North Island dairy farm settlements were more difficult to amalgamate in this fashion because there were limits to the size of herd that a single farmer could milk even with machinery.

In other instances the situation was more complicated. By 1938 the view of Head Office of the Lands Department was that all the sections on Hawthorne Settlement in Canterbury were uneconomic units. The preferred solution was to transfer one settler to another available farm on a nearby settlement and offer the remainder an *ex gratia* payment of £100 to vacate (Commissioner of Crown Lands to McLachlan, 20 July 1938, CH 134 4/106). It was furthermore acknowledged that a considerable amount of 'regrouping' would be necessary to give each of the three farms compact and continuous boundaries. When Malcolm McGregor, one of the original 1920 selectors on Hawthorne settlement in Canterbury, died in 1938 his widow, Mrs McGregor, remained on the farm with an adult son and teenage daughter. In 1939, when it was decided to amalgamate the five properties to form three farms, attention now turned to Mrs McGregor. The official rationale was that since she was receiving a pension and her son was not a competent farm manager she should receive £200 to vacate and continue to rent 25 acres including the house and outbuildings for 12/6 d per week. The Commissioner of Crown Lands was quick to assert that 'Mrs McGregor is not being forced out, but it is considered that she is the most suitable tenant to dispossess and ample provision is made for her vacation' (Commissioner of Crown Lands to Under Secretary for Lands, 6 September 1939, LS 1 21/266). On many other occasions farms were to pass on to a second generation of family members in the 1940s. At the other extreme, the government's cessation of road maintenance spelt the final end, after 16 years of settlement, for the last three of nearly 40 farmers of the soldier settlement scheme in the Mangapurua Valley in 1942, located in the upper reaches of the Whanganui River (Bates 1982). This was the site of the iconic 'Bridge to Nowhere', a Ministry of Works bridge across the river but

with no roads on either side, which became a symbol of the folly and defeat of the soldier bush farming efforts in the isolated and difficult hill country of the upper Whanganui.

This leads on to the question of whether a soldier settlement was different from the surrounding farms. In the rangers' reports 'soldiers' is used for a year or so, then 'soldier settlers' came into vogue, and by the mid-1930s as often as not it was 'settlers' while recognizing that their tenure arrangements remained tied to the soldier settlement legislation. The type one failures were linked in significant ways to war service, but by the mid-1930s type three failures were probably not markedly different from those of other Crown tenants or even those of the wider farming community. Williams (1936, p. 126) articulated such a viewpoint when he wrote 'the passage of time has made the war an "historical episode" and there is no longer any valid reason for a separate scheme outside the Land for Settlements Acts as far as new transactions are concerned'.

The preceding discussion provides the basis for a typology of soldier settlement failure on Crown Lands (Table 3). It also suggests that the episodes of failure take place at differing scales, quite locally but across much of the country for the type one failures, concentrated in selected regions for the type two failures, and across the whole country for type three.

Conclusion

Just as soldier settlement can be defined in narrower and broader senses, its failure can be similarly conceived. In the most constrained sense the failures of soldier settlement were those who exited the settlement blocks from 1918 to 1923. The causes of failure resided in the often mentioned mix of background and personal traits of the men involved (plus war injury and sickness), although in retrospect it seems that officials tended to overplay the lack of previous farming experience and were unwilling to recognize small farm size and other environmental limitations at this point even though they were clearly having an impact on farm productivity and profitability. Small size and high rents would become much more significant in the remainder of the 1920s. The type two failures involved the settlements as

Table 3 A typology of soldier settlement failure

Type	Causes of failure	Type of official explanation	Official responses	Geographical range	Historical periodicity
One	Settler's character and experience Poor farm decision-making	Farmers as actors	Inspection of settlements Forfeiture and surrender of sections	Localities across the country	1917–22
Two	Uneconomic farm units Debt burden	Farm actors plus economic conditions	Revaluation of land Remission and postponements of arrears Amalgamation of farms	Regional spread and impact	1923–28
Three	Falling export prices	International structural conditions	Mortgage adjustment Amalgamation of farms	Nationwide	1929–39

much as the settlers. Other Crown tenants under other land settlement legislation were also impacted as were those farming on freehold land. Thus, it could be argued that those from the mid-1920s who 'walked off' forfeiting or surrendering soldier settlement farms were not necessarily failing because they had for a period of months or years been, most likely conscript, soldiers in the Great War, but because of current account interest and rental arrears made worse by high rents which became unmanageable when primary export prices fell. The original survey and subdivision of farm settlements had produced farms that were increasingly uneconomic as the 1920s unfolded. Although farm amalgamation was one way forward, this could not be completed overnight, especially as the government had no desire to exacerbate the situation by pushing numbers of soldier settlers off their farms. Rather, revaluations of land, rental remissions and postponements and the like were devices used by the state to keep the settler farmers in place. Attempts by the state to make the scheme successful were achieved at considerable human cost to the settlers involved.

The type three failures of the 1930s were triggered by debt levels and depressed export prices exacerbated in some cases by the poor health of settlers, a legacy of war-time service. Over all, however, the soldier settlers were now harder to differentiate from other farmers. The state initiatives, for instance, in terms of mortgage relief were orientated to the rural sector rather than being soldier settler specific.

The typology laid out in Table 3 identifies aspects of the histories and geographies of failure and is put forward as a framework for further inquiry rather than a definitive statement about the nature of the failure of soldier settlement. Neither does it say anything about the relative significance of each of the three suggested episodes of failure. This is a topic for further study. Likewise the discussion here has concentrated on the narrowest conception of soldier settlement; what will happen when the section two purchases are introduced into the discussion? Edward Tilley, for instance, applied successfully to the Canterbury Lands Board for section two loans on two occasions in 1919 before being balloted one of the New Park settlement farms under the original legislation, which serves as a reminder of the dangers of too rigorously separating the settlement farms and the section two farms when a single group of individuals was able to move across these categories (Canterbury Land Board Minutes 1919, CAAR, p. 23).

There was not one single undifferentiated failure of soldier settlement but at least three episodes and different scales of failure. Three ways forward in terms of further research are first, to fill in the gaps in the New Zealand scene particularly with some detailed investigations of other regions such as Auckland and Hawkes Bay, second to look more closely at the section two farms and, third to look comparatively at other national soldier settlement experiences to see if 'failure' can similarly be broken down and its fundamental ingredients

better understood. Finally, if the nature of failure can be understood as being more complex and multifaceted than has generally been appreciated, then arguably the notion of what constitutes ‘success’ can also be usefully deconstructed. Out of these twin endeavours, it might then be possible to offer a more reflective appraisal of soldier settlement scheme within and beyond New Zealand.

Endnotes

- 1 Soldier settlement schemes have a long pedigree in New Zealand, an early example being Fencible settlements such as Howick established to protect Auckland from the Waikato Māori in the 1840s.
- 2 Auckland, particularly North Auckland, is the region where soldier settlement faced difficulties and which may stand apart from some of the present discussion in the light of its rural economy.
- 3 Some properties were farmed as partnerships so that the number of farms was somewhat less than the number of applicants.
- 4 One acre equals 0.4711 ha.
- 5 A special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History* (volume 35, 2000) was given over to shell shock in the Great War.
- 6 Gould (1992a, p. 125) for 1924 put the number of Crown leases under the Discharged Soldier Settlement and other acts at 3439 and properties under section two provisions (both lease-hold and free-hold) at 5045.
- 7 This is a summary of information in the applications for sections 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 12 of Kairanga Settlement. See AAMA Acc W3430 26/8211 Kairanga 12; LS 26/8212 Kairanga 8; AAMX Acc W3430 26/8209 Kairanga 6; LS 1/26/8203 Kairanga 2; LS 1/26/8206 Kairanga 5; LS 1/26/8207 Kairanga 4 part 5, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.
- 8 An example of very frugal risk adverse behaviour is provided by Mr and Mrs McTague on the Coldstream settlement (see Roche 2004).

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