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'The Man Will Never Be A Success'

The Boyne Valley Soldier Settlement Scheme and Human Capital

Abstract: The Australian Soldier Settlement Scheme after World War I is generally acknowledged as a policy failure with few applicants ultimately able to transition to life as successful farmers. The existing literature, as well as the influential Pike Report highlights systematic failures by the government. Poor planning, a lack of training, inconsistent decision making, and a slow and inflexible bureaucracy, are often cited. This article considers the small settlement in the Boyne Valley in Central Queensland and argues that, in addition to the scheme being poorly managed a lack of human capital was the most significant factor leading to failure. Drawing on an analysis of 104 Dead Farm Files held in the Queensland State archives, this article argues that failure would have been likely even under a well-managed scheme as too many of the men were damaged mentally and physically from their war experience.

> "Tell me, O muse, of that ingenious hero who travelled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy. Many cities did he visit, and many were the nations with whose manners and customs he was acquainted; moreover, he suffered much by sea while trying to save his own life and bring his men safely home."[1]

The Christmas Card produced by the Queensland Lands Department in 1920 proudly bears a map with the locations of some eighteen Soldier Settlement localities with a total of 1317 settlers (Fig. 1). The most prominent settlements were at Beerburrum and Stanthorpe which had approximately 300 settlers each. Tucked away in the Boyne Valley, south-west of Gladstone in Central Queensland, settlement 15 had a grand total of forty-five settlers, the second smallest. Another thirty men and their families would end up at Ubobo (one of the four rural townships that make up the Boyne Valley). Though small in size, these 75 settlers provide an important case study. By 1939, only 17 of the original settlers would remain in the Valley. At the end of World War II that would be reduced to twelve, with six men returning to the colours for a second time. By that stage, the settlement would be unrecognisable, with the majority of the land consolidated blocks, mostly leased by non-ex-servicemen. Examining the background and suitability of the Boyne Valley cohort provides insights into the overall failure of the scheme. For well over a century, posterity's finger of blame has been pointed squarely at the government with lack of planning, incompetent management, and a slow and inflexible bureaucracy, often cited as the causes of failure. Using this small settlement in regional Australia as a case study, this article suggests that what Bruce Scates and Melanie Oppenheimer call "human capital" was the most significant factor in determining the fate of the scheme.[2] It will be argued here that even if the Boyne Valley settlers had been given the most favourable circumstances, the damage they had received in the war, physical and psychological, would have made success unlikely.

1 Homer: The Odyssey.
2 Bruce Scates, Melanie Oppenheimer: The Last Battle, p. 246.

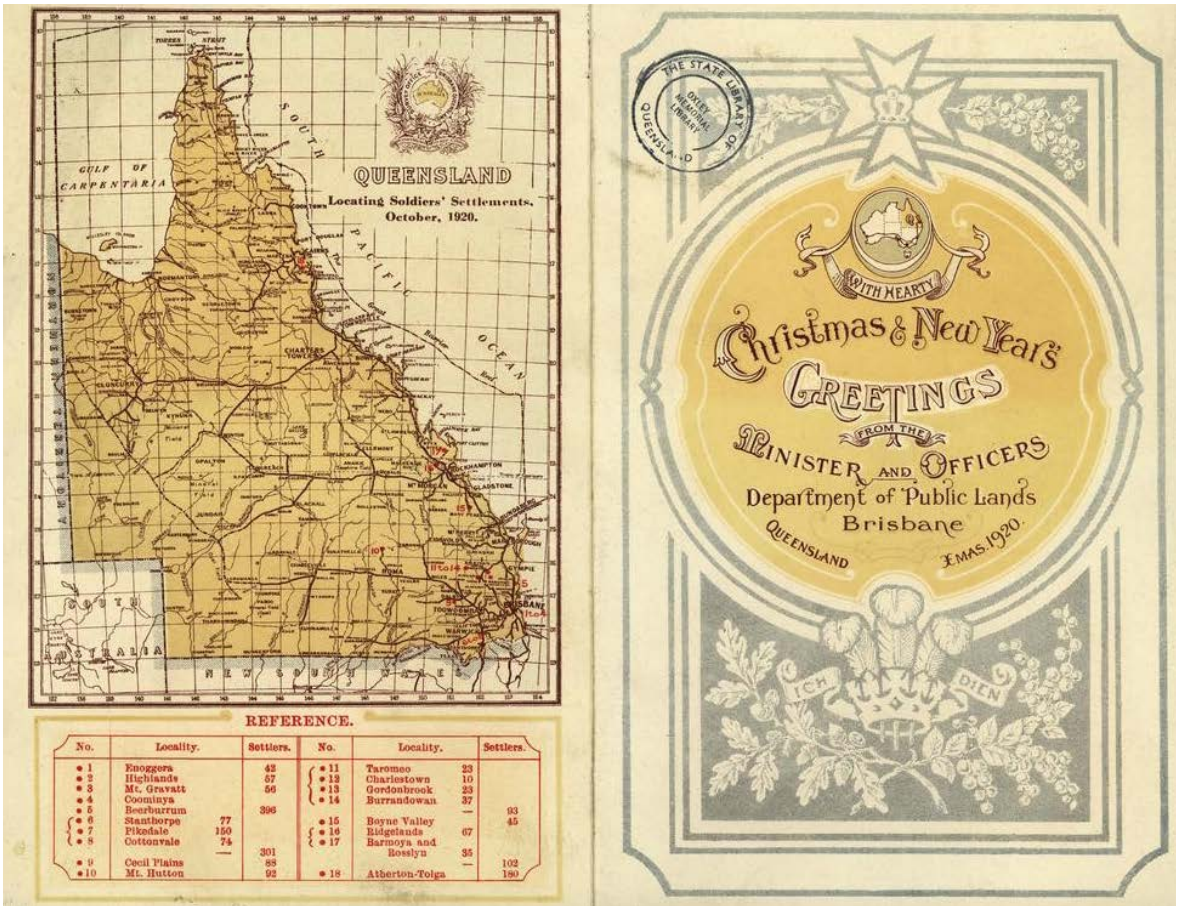

Fig. 1 Christmas greetings from the Minister and Officers of the Department of Public Lands, 1920.

This article is based on an analysis of 104 Dead Farm Files held in the Queensland State archives.[3] For each selection a file was created, which was then the repository of all correspondence, reports, and reviews of the selection for its duration. These files range from less than ten pages where the abandonment or surrender of the selection often happened within six months of the license to occupy was awarded, to three hundred pages or more or where leases were exchanged or altered. Often there are bureaucratic debates which last for twenty or more pages which reflect two or three years of uncertainty and delay for the settlers. It is beyond the scope of this study, but an examination of the War Service Records and Repatriation Files would offer additional insights into the human capital of these settlers and the horrors they experience in war. For the purposes of this article, the Dead Farm Files provides strong evidence that they took to the land with physical and psychological scars.

In terms of the contents, there are three elements to consider. The first is that predominantly the files contain the reports, leases, and internal memoranda created by the Lands Department bureaucrats in Brisbane, as well as its people in the field – land agents, particularly W. A. Collins, and inspectors. For much of this material, the language is formal, bureaucratic, and refers to the selector in the

3 See QSA Series 14050 – Dead Farm Files. For referencing a Perpetual Lease Selection number was allocated. Last year the files were digitised with a grant from the Queensland State Government and work from the Boyne Valley Historical Association to commemorate the centenary of the settlement.

third person. Part of the narrative of the Soldier Settlement Scheme is the story of the disconnect between government, bureaucracy, and the settlers. While this can be identified, it is important to note that the overall tone of the material is generally supportive of the settlers, and a genuine concern to fix problems and issues that beset them – especially the issue of drought and portion sizes. From 1925 on, there is a distinct strategy to consolidate the blocks to ensure the survival of the remaining men.

The second element is the correspondence from settlers to the Department. Naturally, nearly all of this is negative and filled with anger, despair, or puzzlement. Some settlers only wrote to the department when faced with problems that were existential. Many of the files end with a settler's final note of despair before the selection was abandoned. Certain settlers took the 'squeaky wheel' option and were regular correspondents. Others are more obsequious in tone.

One particular aspect of the correspondence was unexpected. Throughout the correspondence there are numerous instances of settlers complaining about the behaviour of their neighbours, or their failure to abide by the conditions of the selections. The first example of this is a letter from a "dinkum digger" who informs on six settlers who are at fault in some ways and suggests it would be wise for the department to send someone to the Valley to "see how things are for themselves on the settlement".[4] Those conversations become more prevalent in the second half of the decade when a clear delineation becomes apparent between the 'better type' of settler, and those whose 'indolent' behaviour is recognised and discussed. It becomes clear that there was an element of cronyism and favouritism in the awarding of extra land, or extensions of times for a select group in the Valley.

The third element is less quantifiable. Because they are written sources, what is unsaid or unreported is more difficult to identify. A thin file can be reflective of a trouble-free period of selection, while an assumption can be made that the thicker the file the more 'interesting' and 'valuable' its contents will be. That assumption can be hazardous, as one can find the first piece of correspondence in two years describing a neighbour's cows surviving by eating bark off the trees for want of grass or fodder. Also, as one reads a discussion of who will be awarded an extra block of land, or access to permanent water, the duration of that debate is a factor in the settler's survival. Many of these issues took many months as correspondence from land agents and the department went back and forth weighing the various arguments. During that time, the settlers were in limbo. So while the files are wonderful sources, there is a need for caution in taking them as a clear picture of the selection narrative. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the files do suggest that human capital was the most significant factor in the many instances of failure.

Before examining the files, this article will provide some background to the Soldier Settlement Scheme and the existing literature. The dominant narrative of the Soldier Settlement Scheme has been heavily influenced by Justice George Herbert Pike who in 1929 released his 'Report on Losses Due to Soldier

4 QSA: P.L.S. 1830, Newton, ID3479174, p. 88.

Settlement'.[5] While not the main focus of his report, his four reasons for failure have provided the parameters for most discussions of the Soldier Settlement Scheme:

1. Want of capital;
2. Want of home maintenance area;
3. Unsuitability of settlers; due to a large extent to war services and want of training;
4. Drop in value of primary products, chiefly on irrigation areas.[6]

Despite the importance of the third factor, discussion in the literature tends to provide only anecdotal evidence of the human struggles of the soldier settlement. Both Scates and Oppenheimer and Marilyn Lake focus on the first two findings, and the lack of government will or capacity to recognise the problems and provide solutions.[7] In each case, this makes perfect sense as they are books looking at the policy and overall implementation of the scheme. Individual settler's experiences provide evidence for government mismanagement or failings, however, it is the latter that is their focus rather than a study of the settlers themselves.[8] The fourth finding differs according to states, but in the Boyne Valley the collapse in milk prices and the Port Curtis Dairy Association's obfuscation in grading the settlers' milk is evidence of the importance of this cause.[9]

Pike divides his third finding idea into two aspects – war service and want of training. This article does not attempt a comprehensive prosopographical study of the Boyne Valley settlers but such a project would be valuable as a way of quantifying these two elements. The attestation papers provide us with an insight into the men pre-war. We know their age, skills, birthplace and general health. Most of the men were young, lacking skills, and lived in rural and regional areas. The war service records provide us with vast detail that can measure the effects of service on the settlers' capacity. Key evidence includes detailed descriptions of wounds and illnesses, the length of time spent on the front line, in hospitals, and peculiarities of each man's service (such as a predisposition to Absence Without Leave or Courts Martial).

Australia paid a high price for its participation in the war with one in six members of the Australian Imperial Force not returning. The Boyne Valley settlers all survived but they did not come home unscarred. Of the group, nearly two thirds were medically discharged, and it is in the decision-making process surrounding the discharge we can find a very helpful clue as to what Pike might have been trying to measure in his term "unsuitability". Before discharge a panel of doctors was assembled that filled out 'Army Form B, 179 – Medical Report on Invalid'. Question 24 is of particular interest:

> To what extent is his capacity for earning a full livelihood in the general labour market lessened at present? In defining the extent of his inability to earn a livelihood, estimate it as ¼, ½. ¾, or total incapacity.[10]

5 See George Herbert Pike: Report on Losses Due to Soldier Settlement, pp. 22-25.
6 See ibid., p. 23.
7 See Marilyn Lake: The Limits of Hope.
8 See ibid., p. 120.
9 See Bundaberg Mail, 27 February 1922 (Ubobo Soldier Settlement).
10 Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office. World War I Service Records. Series B2455, Barcode 8021047, NAA B2455 Polley Arthur Harold Ernest, NAA.

In Arthur Polley's case, an anonymous hand has written "¾ - 75%".[11]

All this detail only measures the physical scars. Both Marina Larsson and Leigh Straw have written on the psychological scars carried by the returned soldiers.[12] Larsson's thesis is that the psychological scars are as important as the more quantifiable physical costs of the war. Straw adds another dimension of the repatriation process when she points out that the Western Australian returned men were especially problematic as many were British or interstate immigrants and had no family waiting for their return. Furthermore, she emphasises isolation as a key factor in the problem of rehabilitation.[13] An analysis of the Boyne Valley men reveals a high rate of British born men, who on their attestation papers recorded their parents as still in Britain. In terms of isolation, the Boyne Valley was, and is, a place that at first experience feels like the middle of nowhere. This would surely have affected their human capital.

The evidence for the trauma caused by the war can also be found in the Lands Department and Repatriation Department records. All the records contain correspondence from the settlers which only points to their paucity of human capital. As the 1920s progresses, the language of the settlers becomes more frustrated and despairing. Charles Kelly's prefaced his request for an extension of rent in 1928 by stating "he had had a bad time of it early this year".[14] The subtext is deafening.

Pike's second aspect of the unsuitability is want of training. Virtually none was offered in the Boyne Valley, unlike the (poorly managed) training farms at Beerburrum and Pikedale. Some help was offered by Messrs Hellen and Murray, local landowners, however, there seems to be a complete lack of support offered by state and local government bodies. Dairy farming is not a simple business and the newspaper articles on the settlement detail the problems the settlers faced in establishing dairy herds on small portions in an unforgiving environment.[15]

To measure human capital we need to look at the age, skills, and background of the men before they went to war. The Boyne Valley men were largely unskilled and young when they enlisted. Their war experiences were violent and often the young men were away from Australia for several years. Most suffered wounds, illnesses, or both. Despite the elusive nature of human capital, this article contends that, for the 75 settlers in the Boyne Valley at least, it is the key to understanding the failure of the scheme.

In November 1919, the 'Daily Standard' ran a series of articles extolling the promise of a new era for Queensland. On Friday 28 November 1919, the headline heralded "millions of acres of fertile land" were available for selection in what was the "Wonderland of the Southern Hemisphere".[16] By January 1921, the Boyne Valley Soldier Settlement was an actuality. The 'Bundaberg Mail' noted that 11 472 acres had been set aside for forty-five portions.[17] It was proud to announce

11 Ibid.
12 See Marina Larsson: Shattered Anzacs; Leigh Straw: After the War.
13 See ibid., p. 8.
14 Queensland Lands Department: Perpetual Lease Selections. Series 14050. Item 68932. Selection 1915. Queensland State Archives. (QSA).
15 See Bundaberg Mail, 27 February 1922, (Ubobo Soldier Settlement).
16 Daily Standard, 28 November 1919, p. 8 (Queensland wants Millions of New Settlers).
17 See Bundaberg Mail, 14 January 1921, p. 3.

that several returned soldiers had already been 'repatriated' to blocks in the Valley. The Queensland Soldier Settlement schemes had begun.

Despite this initial enthusiasm, three key factors can be seen in the problematic development of the Valley. Rainfall in 1922 and 1923 was approximately half the normal amount. While the settlers with river frontage were less affected, many of those on portions away from the flats found that their 'permanent' water creeks and wells were not. As well, the failure of the Calliope Council and the Queensland Railway Department meant that critical infrastructure to transport cream to Gladstone was below par, or non-existent. This meant that by the time the cream reached the Port Curtis Dairy it was graded poorly, lowering of the price for the farmer. The decision to introduce cotton into the valley was a catastrophe. Not only is cotton a water intensive crop, but it is also labour intensive for the men who were already burdened with clearing and fencing their selections. Growing cotton was a distraction to the main game, which was dairying. The results were disappointing at best and was virtually abandoned after a couple of attempts. Each of these factors are referred to within the two serialised reports on the settlement by the 'Bundaberg Mail' in February 1922 and the 'Morning Bulletin' in August 1923. These reports provide eyewitness, if anecdotal, comments on the realities of the valley that provide a foil to the Lands Department files.

Finally, the department and its representatives felt the need to proactively decide who was worth supporting, and those who should be either abandoned or forced to abandon their selections. In 1923, a list of eight selectors were identified who "will never make a success anywhere as such settlers in all instances breed a feeling of dissatisfaction among the better class of tryers". The report goes on to recommend that "every endeavour should be made to have these men removed".[18]

In February 1922, the 'Bundaberg Mail' commissioned a series of six weekly articles on the Boyne Valley Settlers.[19] Its tone is overwhelmingly optimistic, and we are given a series of accounts of the successes, trials and tribulations of individual settlers. Its detail is useful as a means of providing an alternative perspective to the lands department files. Eighteen Months later the 'Brisbane Courier' would happily comment that, "in the Boyne Valley, success is being achieved, and prospects for a prosperous future are bright".[20] What the article fails to mention is that by this time, seventeen, or nearly a third of the Boyne Valley portions had either been surrendered or abandoned.

The Boyne Valley Soldier Settlement was situated midway along the Boyne Valley which runs from Calliope in the north, to Monto in the south. The forty-five portions were surveyed from three pastoral leases between Nagoorin and Hellens' siding. The settlement ran along the west bank of the Boyne River, which essentially runs north to south in this part of the valley. The portions were of varied size and quality.[21] The prize portions were no.s 106-120, which were river

18 QSA: P. L. S. 1830, Newton, ID 3479174, p. 56.

19 See Bundaberg Mail, Seven Part Series, 13 February 1922 – 3 March 1922, (Ubobo Soldier Settlement).

20 Brisbane Courier, 7 August 1923, p. 6 (A Happy Corner, Boyne Valley Settlement).

21 A number of maps exist of the planned settlement. The main source used for this article is a map produced titled Soldier Settlement, Parishes of Wietalaba and Milton, For Free Distribution. It was presumably produced in 1920. Its scale is 40 Chains to an inch or roughly one

flats, each with river frontage. As well, their western boundaries ran alongside the Boyne Valley Railway – which suggested ease of access to the Port Curtis Dairy based in Gladstone, approximately fifty kilometres north-east. They were partially cleared and fenced, however had been only used for occasional grazing by cattle. No intensive agriculture or dairying had been done. The drawback of these portions was their size – most on average were between eighty to one hundred acres which was to limit the size of the herds the settlers could carry.

Across the railway were the majority of the portions. Directly alongside the western side of the railway, portions no. 123-132 were also quite small, however were still quite level. These portions lacked permanent water, however the digging of wells proved relatively successful. These were the first portions to be consolidated into larger blocks in the early years. Alfred Stephenson and the Turner family would eventually merge eight portions into two viable farms.[22] From there, the quality of the portions became variable at best. The largest of the portions was over a thousand acres, however, most straddled the hills that rise to the west of the valley. The land was rocky, uneven, and heavily wooded. These portions' suitability for dairying and cropping would come into question as the settlement grew.

What is remarkable about the Boyne Valley Settlement compared to others is its lack of planning or strategy. As a small settlement, it seems to have been virtually ignored by the department and the state government who were understandably more concerned about the larger settlements which had a clear goal, however misguided, and attracted the lion's share of investment and infrastructure. The Beerburrum settlement was pineapple based – there was a training farm and the government built a canning factory in Brisbane to ensure a market for the produce. Atherton had maize, and eventually the Kauri silo was built in 1926 at considerable cost for storage. An entire railway line was built at Stanthorpe, together with a training farm. There was none of this in the Boyne Valley. The allocation of portions was unsystematic, there was little or no oversight or training, and the lack of infrastructure seems unforgivable. For a planned dairying industry, the lack of daily trains to Gladstone, and the fact that there was no station built for the settlement until 1924 seems at best incompetent, if not negligent.[23]

This was the situation that awaited the settlers as they arrived in 1920 and 1921. Unfortunately, we have virtually no record of their first impressions, nor how they were supposed to create an existence from nothing. The only two sources are vignettes at best, however, they are worth considering. In his foreword to his father's diary, Syd Davies describes his father and wife arriving in the valley on

kilometre to six centimetres. One of its features is a table of the land value per acre of the portions, indicating their supposed quality. The original is proudly displayed at the Boyne Valley Historical Association's cottage at Ubobo.

22 See QSA: P. L. S. 2134, Stephenson, ID 181955, and QSA: P. L. S. 1780, 2147, Turner, IDs 181926 and 192423.

23 See Brisbane Courier, 19 December 1922, p. 9. This is an example of a number of complaints from settlers about the lack of a railway service for the settlement. The only sidings were at Nagoorin and opposite Hellen's farm.

a horse and cart. They owned a bed and an iron stove. Their building materials consisted of two sheets of corrugated iron.[24]

The most astonishing arrival was that of William Glanville Smellie. The 'Bundaberg Mail' enthusiastically noted in 1922 that being a graduate of the Gatton Agricultural College would stand him in good stead for the future.[25] It did not. Despite his training, Smellie's success was not assured and a report from the land inspector points to human capital in addition to other factors. It concluded in January of 1923 that he was: "An erratic settler, inclined to drink freely on occasion […] This settler may eventually make good, but I am very doubtful".[26] Even before then, in October 1922, Smellie had asked for a bigger portion, repeating his request in March 1923.[27] In July William Collins telegrammed the department that the portion had been abandoned and the stock and equipment were being cared for by a neighbour.[28] Smellie wrote to the department in August pleading his case. The tone of the letter can only be described as one of despair. He wrote:

> I worked like blazes for seventeen months and spent a lot of my own money on Portion 128, and found it impossible to make a living or even get back the money I had spent on it, owing to the land being unsuitable for agriculture, and too small for anything else.[29]

There is no reply. The last note is a letter from the Department offering him land in Atherton or Kingaroy.[30] It was returned unclaimed and unanswered.

Smellie was one of thirty settlers who lasted less than two years in the Valley. It is an extraordinary attrition rate – sixty per cent of the portions available were turned over by the end of 1924. The question that must be asked is why such a large number of the early arrivals failed so quickly. Justice Pike's four reasons are a useful starting point, however Smellie's narrative reflects key elements in the failure of the thirty early arrivals.

The first and most obvious is the size and quality of the portions allotted, compounded by the second elemental problem, which was the department's refusal to acknowledge the problem until the second half of 1923. Thirdly, and most importantly in terms of this article's argument, the human capital of the settlers was clearly an issue. Smellie's numerous letters are pervaded by exhaustion and despair. Smellie was dismissed as "erratic" – not surprisingly given he had received a severe gunshot wound to his ankle in early 1918 after three years overseas which included lengthy hospitalisations for varicocele and appendicitis in Egypt before a six month stint in the trenches in France.[31] Presumably ploughing rock-hard ground and watching ever decreasing cream cheques did not improve his mental or physical capacity. For the thirty men who failed so quickly, there is clear evidence of human failure, but perhaps more sadly, clear evidence of the

24 See Roy Ramsay: Hell, Hope and Heroes, p. 259.
25 See Bundaberg Mail, 9 March 1922, p. 4. (Nagoorin).
26 QSA: P.L.S. 1916, Smellie, ID 3479227, pp. 112-129.
27 See ibid., p. 82.
28 See ibid., p. 73.
29 See ibid., p. 70.
30 See ibid., p. 79.
31 NAA: B2455/ Smellie WG. Barcode 8086661.

department passing judgement on those men and effectively abandoning them in terms of support – as abruptly as the men abandoned their selections.

The thirty settlers were hardly exceptional in terms of the AIF cohort. Nearly all were in their mid to late twenties. Most had found themselves in regional Queensland after the war, and the applications for their selections were signed in Bundaberg, Gladstone, and Rockhampton. Their lack of skills and experience were obvious. Aside from a musician, undertaker, and fireman, the majority were simply unskilled labourers. Only four were married, a point made by the 'Bundaberg Mail' in its series on the settlement. By February 1922, the 'Mail' noted that:

> More than one bachelor has abandoned the block he originally selected, and these are now being taken up by married men with children.[32]

As human capital, they do not inspire confidence. A third had been born overseas (mainly England), half a dozen came from NSW and Victoria. The rest had been born and raised in regional Queensland, though Cairns and Charters Towers can hardly be counted as close to the Boyne Valley.

Looking at Western Australian ex-servicemen, Straw notes that many arrived in Fremantle with no family or home awaiting them.[33] She argues this made them particularly susceptible to mental health issues and loneliness. One can infer this is the case with the thirty men who arrived in the Boyne Valley through 1920 and 1921. Alone, far from family, they lacked fundamental support networks that may have made a difference. Unskilled, and with their physical health affected by their war service, it is not surprising that many struggled. Their war service records are representative of a sample of the AIF. Eight had been wounded in action, eleven had experienced long-term hospitalisations for illnesses. On average, they had spent thirty months away from Australia. Even the 'Mail''s optimism was tempered by the reality of the men:

> I am still of the opinion that the settlers, with the exception of a very small proportion, will make good. This portion constitutes men who have been rendered incompetent by war's alarms, their physical conditions having been so radically altered that they are unable to concentrate their energies for any length of time on the tedious, and sustained work mixed farming, and especially dairying entails.[34]

Tragically, the proportion of settlers too damaged from the war to "make good" was not "very small" and human capital would be the key element of failure as the decade progressed.

It did not take long for the issue of the size of the portions to become apparent. Mayo Clarke, a boat builder from Denver in the United States, applied for and was allocated portion 134 in February 1922.[35] The portion consisted of 160 acres, with Fidler Creek being its Northern boundary. Valued at £2.10s per acre it was one of the "better" portions. By May, having spent £58 on clearing and fencing, Clarke had surrendered the portion and walked away.[36] Mr Thomson, the

32 Bundaberg Mail, 15 February 1922, p. 5 (Ubobo Soldier Settlement).
33 See Leigh Straw: After the War, p. 8.
34 Bundaberg Mail, 6 March 1922, p. 6 (Ubobo Soldier Settlement – Conclusion).
35 See NAA: B2455, Clark MC. Barcode 1967574; QSA: P. L. S 1911, ID 3479222, p. 1.
36 See ibid., p. 4.

Supervisor Soldier Settlements Central Districts, based in Rockhampton wrote to his superiors in Brisbane:

> As previously advised the area of this portion is too small and the quality of the soil is of an inferior quality, and in my opinion dose [sic] not constitute a living area.[37]

Within a fortnight Thomson had his reply. The under-secretary wrote that a prospective settler "had been over the ground three times" and was well acquainted with the "merits and faults" of the portion.[38] Thomson's advice was ignored and the prospective settler, one Robert John Bell was allocated the portion. He would surrender the portion in May 1924, almost two years to the day he arrived in the Valley. The Clarke case highlights the initial intransigence of the department to listen to early concerns about the size and quality of the portions allocated.

By the end of the year, the conversation had begun to change. After Claude McDonald had left the valley in late 1922, William Collins did an audit of the improvements made on "Abandoned Portion 110, Milton". Collins noted that McDonald had constructed buildings worth £247, as well as clearing and fencing worth £123 – as well as running eighteen milking cows. At the bottom of his report, he notes that the area is "too small for dairying".[39] Collins recommended increasing the size of the portion. Across the bottom a bureaucrat has written that "150 acres from 124 and 24 be added to portion 110 Milton". The reality of the problem was beginning to be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, the intransigence would be seen in the refusal to increase William Smellie's portion until he abandoned it in July 1923. The gradual understanding was too late for most of the thirty settlers. Fourteen had either surrendered or abandoned their portions in 1922, a further ten throughout 1923. Justice Pike's second reason for failure, the want of the home maintenance area certainly manifested itself in the first two years of the Boyne Valley Soldier Settlement.

Two postscripts are worth adding to the land narrative. In July 1924 William Collins wrote to Mr Fraser, who had taken over Thompson's role in Rockhampton. William Newton had abandoned Portion 152 after Job-like tribulations.[40] Like Smellie's file, much of the later correspondence revolves around the jockeying for the land, the principal competitors being William Binns and Herbert Lucas, whose portions 152 and 142 bordered the west and east perimeters of Newton's land. Collins' fears are expressed bluntly as the wisdom of Solomon was required. He wrote:

> [I]f Binns and Lucas are given the areas they ask for, most of the other settlers will be asking for similar areas. Some of the settlers are asking for extra areas so that they can run large dairy herds and depend on natural grasses. I am satisfied if they would grow more fodder crops and look after a small dairy herd, they would be better off.[41]

The implications and assumptions in the above passage are key to the management of the settlers in the Boyne Valley. They were there to be yeomen, not

37 Ibid., p. 7.
38 Ibid., p. 8.
39 QSA: P.L.S. 1818, McDonald. ID 3479222, p. 9.
40 See QSA: P.L.S. 1830, Newton. ID 3479174, p. 104.
41 Ibid., p. 115.

graziers. The portions were to be worked and improved, and the blood, sweat and tears of the settlers was to be a given. As will be discussed more fully below, there is a subtext of laziness inherent in the passage. Mr Collins firmly believed that hard work, rather than an acknowledgment of the problem, would prevail. Mr Fraser's reply, typed below Mr Collins letter confirms this understanding:

> I recommend that Messrs Binns and Lucas be advised, that as their holdings are considered living areas as they now stand, consideration cannot be given to their requests for additional land.

It would take another two years for the reality of the situation to really strike home. The consolidation of the portions would accelerate in the second half of the decade, too late for the first arrivals.

Clearly the size of the portions and quality of the land were key elements in the lack of progress in the Boyne Valley, however this article suggests that it was human capital was the ultimate cause of so many failures. Evidence for this is not straightforward as much of the material involves qualitative judgements and opinions. In fact, one might argue that one of the reasons for failure was the opinion of the rangers and supervisors that some settlers were unlikely to succeed, thereby ensuring they would not.

Frank Casson had surrendered his portion in May 1922 after a year in the valley due to "straitened financial circumstances, as stated by him, and his inability to make a living".[42] However, after two weeks, he changed his mind and requested that he return to the portion. Mr Thompson in Rockhampton thought otherwise, and his note to Brisbane is unambiguous:

> In view of this Settler Casson's past demeanour whilst in occupation, and who has frequently repeated his intention of giving up the portion, and the remarks from the Overseer regarding this Settler's ability to carry on and make a success, I have grave doubts as to whether his present attitude is genuine and bonafied [sic].[43]

This is the earliest instance where a settler is judged on his attitude. We have no way of knowing how this judgement was formed, and if "attitude" is the subtext for other failures of character or temperament. Reading his file today, it is possible, if not probable, that Casson was attempting to make a living from his portion while facing mental health issues. The traumatic impact of war service did not appear to garner much sympathy and in Mr Thompson's opinion, Casson's human capital was not worth much.

In the February 1922 'Bundaberg Mail' series, Robert Ellis is described as a model settler.[44] His portion 111 was a small 108 acres situated at the north end of the settlement was river frontage.[45] The 'Mail' noted "Ellis has not been idle", however he had been forced to give up dairying, as the low cream price and the paucity of his herd (only eight cows) had led him to breeding pigs and experimenting with different crops. The reporter noted that "every spare moment at his disposal is devoted to the improvement of his farm".

42 QSA: P.L.S. 1829, Casson, p. 10.
43 Ibid.
44 See Bundaberg Mail, 15 February 1922, p. 5 (Ubobo Soldier Settlement).
45 See QSA: P.L.S. 1792, Ellis. ID 3479138.

By January 1923, an anonymous ranger had audited Ellis's portion. Ellis had erected a house, milking yards and 77 chains of fencing (approximately one mile) worth £243 as well as clearing and ploughing twelve acres. However, it is the note at the bottom that is worth quoting in full:

> An exceedingly poor type of settler. Always complaining but doing very little work. Is now engaged in half-heartedly planting cotton and has a partner with him on this deal. Most of their time is spent riding horseback around the country. Through inattention the cotton will probably be a failure and Ellis will leave.[46]

Not unsurprisingly, Ellis abandoned the portion in the second half of the year finding work at the sawmill in Nagoorin. It is difficult to reconcile the two accounts. Like Casson, Ellis may have been facing mental health challenges but from a bureaucratic perspective a judgment had been made.

There were cases where the problem of human capital was unambiguous. By Christmas 1922, all three McDonald brothers had abandoned their portions. In January 1923, after the usual audit of Leonard's portion, the report notes that:

> This settler has lately been ordered to Brisbane by Medical Board Officer to undergo treatment at the Rosemount Hospital. It is probable that he won't return as his case is a bad one.[47]

On 4 October 1917, Leonard McDonald had endured gunshot and shrapnel wounds to his scalp in fighting which cost the lives of 36 men of the 41st Battalion and left 208 wounded. Leonard would spend two months in hospital before being shipped home.[48] The case, was indeed a bad one. He was referred to the Repatriation Hospital in Windsor, then sent to a rest home in Toowoomba.[49] By the end of 1924, Leonard McDonald had been awarded a 100 per cent pension for tuberculosis. He would spend the next decade living in Nudgee Road Hamilton, until dying, aged forty in 1936. His death certificate lists three causes of death: pulmonary tuberculosis, asthenia and exhaustion.[50]

Charles Speas is another settler whose health conditions made his success as a settler unlikely. He enlisted in Cairns in July 1917, only weeks after marrying his wife, Annie in Brisbane.[51] The first half of his war service record is devoted to identifying who he actually was, as he had enlisted under a false name. Meanwhile he had been hospitalised twice for gonorrhoea, and once for mumps, influenza, and measles, respectively. In May 1918 he had received a flesh wound from a bullet in his right leg and in August 1918 he was a victim of a mustard gas attack and was hospitalized for two months before returning home. Despite, this somewhat chequered past, Speas was allocated portion 166 in the valley.[52] Eighteen months later, in June 1923, despite having erected a house and yards, the district land office in Gladstone reported to Brisbane:

46 Ibid., p. 10.
47 QSA: P. L. S. 1884, McDonald. ID 3479210, p. 8.
48 See NAA: B2455, McDonald L. Barcode 184268.
49 See NAA: B709/1 M7486 Pt 2. Barcode 32253889'
50 See Marina Larsson: Shattered Anzacs, p. 178-205. Larsson devotes an entire chapter to TB arguing it was one of the most pervasive problems for returned soldiers.
51 See NAA: B2455, Speas Charles. Barcode 8090227.
52 See QSA: P. L. S. 1880, Speas. ID 3479206.

> He left the district some months ago, leaving an infant child which had deserted, and he is not likely to return to the district.[53]

One might consider the report an understatement of Speas' human capital.

Robert Macpherson was not one of the thirty, however, he appears to have been the bane of William Collins' life in the six years he was in the Valley.[54] His file runs to some one hundred pages, many of which represent a continual stream of poor reports and demands for payment of arrears of loans. On 6 March 1923, a public servant has scrawled across the bottom of a typed document "attach to Macpherson file".[55] It is a document that pulls no punches and is confronting in the language used to describe the eight named men. The extract from the Chief Supervisor's report reflects a growing sense of frustration:

> There are a few who, however, will never make a success anywhere as such settlers in all instances breed a feeling of dissatisfaction among the better class of tryers, every endeavour should be made to have this type of settler removed and I strongly recommend the calling up of the loan and dispossession of the following settlers who have not even tried to work their holdings.[56]

This unambiguous statement reflects a growing discussion as to why the soldier settlement scheme was in distress. Both Lake and Scates and Oppenheimer point to a 'rotten apple' line of discussion in the years from 1923-1926, where governments and departments blamed settlers for apparently not trying, or having a bad attitude, or in Smellie's case, being inclined to drink.[57] There is little consideration in the official reports that the physical and mental toll of war service was a contributing factor.

In this case the eight settlers named seemed to have been judged harshly. Claude and William McDonald are the first named. Claude had made significant improvements to his portion while William had erected a house, as well as fencing, clearing and yards valued at £77 after he had forfeited the land in December 1922.[58] The Chief Supervisor's thoughts may have been coloured by the undue haste both men "abandoned" their portions, however, their brother's treatment in Brisbane might be considered a reasonable distraction and cause for their departure.

Both Charles Mulder and Rupert Nicholson managed to transfer their portions in 1924.[59] It should be noted that Nicholson's portions, 12 and 54 were surrendered by his successor, Mr Foley the following year.[60] Portion 54 was situated on a bend in the Boyne River and was one of four portions prone to flooding during rains. Each portion was allocated a small block on higher ground to build a house which would stay dry. The want of a home maintenance area is telling in this regard. Raymond Gridley may deserve the Chief Supervisor's wrath. Gri-

53 Ibid., p. 4.
54 See QSA: P.L.S. 1797, MacPherson. ID 3479142.
55 Ibid., p. 32.
56 Ibid.
57 See Bruce Scates, Melanie Oppenheimer: The Last Battle, Chapter 2. Lake, The Limits of Hope, p. 203.
58 See QSA: P.L.S. 1854, McDonald W. ID 3479184, p. 8.
59 See QSA: P.L.S. 1883, Nicholson. ID 3479209.
60 See QSA: P.L.S. 1779, Turner. ID 3479206. There is no file for Foley. Turner's file indicates he took over Foley's portion sometime in 1926.

dley was a musician born in Creston, Iowa, who enlisted in Dalby in 1917.[61] His file contains only his application, a prickly report, and a copy of the Government Gazette offering the land for reselection in March 1923.[62] There is no trace of Gridley in any of the newspaper reports about the settlement.

Hugh Fox was the second last named. Fox had enlisted in Charters Towers in October 1915.[63] Fox's war service was unusual; after four months in the trenches, he succumbed to a debilitating bout of influenza which hospitalised him for four months at the end of 1916. After that, he was transferred out of the 26th Battalion to a light railway company where he would spend the rest of the war. In December 1920, Fox became one of the first settlers in the Valley, allocated portion 117, 136 acres with river frontage.[64] In December 1922, the supervisor noted that Fox had been absent for a considerable time. An audit of improvements was made and the land forfeited in June 1923. The sole building on the portion was a weatherboard hut with a galvanised iron roof, valued at £25. This shelter appears to have been Fox's home. Some clearing and fencing had been done and a calf pen built worth £5. A notable entry was a debit of £7 10s for missing tools. A departmental official has circled the entry and noted in red ink at the bottom of the page: "As selector held the portion for almost three years, the tools have probably been broken or worn out".[65] One suspects as had their owner.

The last name on the list is William Henry Newton. Newton's experience perhaps best personifies the tribulations of the thirty failures and for this reason will be discussed in greater detail. Newton enlisted in Charleville in February 1915.[66] However, he failed to reach Gallipoli, disembarking in Mudros in December 1915 with Enteric Fever. Shipped to Alexandria by January 1916 the fever transmogrified into Paratyphoid and he was shipped back to Australia. In October he returned to Egypt and joined the Second Light Horse. His war is relatively uneventful after that, however, has contracted Malaria when shipped home in February 1919.

Newton applied for and was granted Portion 152 in February 1921.[67] The first sign of trouble in the file is a letter dated October 1921 from Mr Gray, the general store owner in Nagoorin who wrote to the department complaining that Newton had run up a credit of £28 and had shown no signs of paying.[68] The department debited the money from Newton's loan account, and Mr Collins was asked to have a quiet word with Newton.

By June 1922 there is serious trouble. Newton had been doing odd jobs around the district but hurt his back and wrote to Collins asking for an extension of time on his payments as he would be "laid up in bed for an indefinite time" and that

61 See NAA: B2455, Gridley R. Barcode 4711471.
62 See QSA: P.L.S. 1847, Gridley. ID 3479178.
63 See NAA: B2455, Fox H. Barcode 4019526.
64 See QSA: P.L.S. 1783, Fox. ID 3479131.
65 Ibid., 10.
66 See NAA: B2455, Newton WH. Barcode 7993458. Newton was a member of Olden's Force, a small force of Australians sent into inland Egypt to quell a 'native' rebellion in the first months of 1919.
67 See QSA: P.L.S. 1830, Newton. ID 3479174.
68 See ibid., p. 38.

his cows have gone dry.[69] With no income the extension was granted however by December 1922, the acting supervisor had lost patience and visited Newton for an audit of the selection. The assets on the selection included a house, and some 214 chains of fencing. At the bottom of the page, however, there is the following note:

> Strongly recommend the Loan be called up in this case. The man will never be a success and is continuously away from the holding, allowing his stock to the mercy of anyone good enough to milk and take care of them.[70]

The file then notes a ministerial decision to take possession of the selection.

By this stage, Newton's fate seems to have been decided with other settlers contriving with Collins to take a share of his portion. The final process for Newton was to be invited to show cause why his selection should not be forfeited. In the final irony, one of the key reasons given on the document is his failure to continuously occupy the land. The document is dated 23 December 1923, and is signed by W. McCormack, the secretary of Public Lands. It was then posted to Newton care of the Post Office at Nagoorin. The file then contains one of the most powerful artefacts of this article.[71] The envelope carrying the show cause document was returned to the lands department. Across the back of the envelope are a number of carbon stampings from the Post Offices at Gladstone and Nagoorin, and the Dead Letter Office at the Brisbane GPO. Across the bottom the envelope the postmaster at Nagooring has stamped and initialled unclaimed. Newton had gone. He returned to his birthplace at Mount Morgan and died in 1930 aged thirty-eight.[72] His grave is in the Mount Morgan cemetery.

What the Lands Department did not factor in was Newton's human capital. His Repatriation File provides depressing reading. The malaria which he contracted in Egypt stayed with him for the rest of his life. Given a 40 per cent pension in 1919, his pension was suspended in 1922 for failing to attend a medical, about the time when the foreclosure notice was returned unclaimed. On his death certificate, the causes of death are miner's phthisis, double pneumonia, and heart failure. His widow, Mabel is quoted as saying he was continually sick, losing jobs at the Many Peaks mine, cotton picking, and "hunting opossums".[73] On the medical certificate notes that he died under an operation for appendicitis, then states: "The causes of death are in no way related to the man's war service disabilities or conditions of service overseas".[74]

Newton's story is one of a flawed individual; definitely physically and most likely psychologically. His time in the Valley was one of struggle, with the land, himself, his illness, the Lands and Repatriation Departments, and his fellow selectors. His fate was probably inevitable. Put simply, a lack of human capital can be readily identified as the main cause of failure. This combined with departmental judgement and the attempts by other settlers to consolidate their holdings

69 Ibid., pp. 49 f.
70 Ibid., p. 54.
71 See ibid., pp. 100-103.
72 See NAA: J34, C24972. Barcode 32552342.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.

left him with no chance. He, and the other twenty-nine settlers who lasted less than two years in the valley, can be classed as the victims of their own weakness, and of the Soldier Settlement Scheme's flaws.

The Soldier Settlement Scheme is one of the great tragedies of Australian history, because it does not fit neatly within the Anzac and Kokoda narratives of the Australian war experience in the first half of the 20th century. It is a difficult topic. The resources that have been spent in the years leading up to the centenary of Anzac and the end of World War I have been enormous, as governments and institutions place the Anzac experience as the cornerstone of Australian national history. Unfortunately, the sequel to that story receives less exposure than its reality deserves. The literature of the scheme tends to be at a macro level, analysing the failures of government and bureaucracy within the framework of Pike's four findings.

This article has examined the experience in Central Queensland. The case study of the Boyne Valley does not dispute that the scheme was deeply flawed and that the bureaucratic oversight was often incompetent and unsympathetic. Indeed, it has offered supportive evidence of this. What the case study also shows is the human tragedy of the scheme. The analysis of the men of the Boyne Valley in this article contends that even if the bureaucratic issues had been addressed, the failure of the scheme was likely inevitable due to the nature of the human capital. Young and unskilled before the war, the value of the Soldier Settlement Scheme's assets was traumatically and violently shattered by the experience of the trenches at Gallipoli and in France. One hundred years on, we can reflect on the Soldier Settlement Scheme, placing it in the context of the problem, understood from Homer's Odysseus to the present, of what to do with the men coming home from the wars.

References

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Christmas greetings from the Minister and Officers of the Department of Public Lands, 1920.

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