For King and country

What you should know

- The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.
- Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward inquiries for a fee of $55 per hour, including copying and postage.
- For further information, phone 6925 3666, email *archive@csu.edu.au* or visit the website at *www.csu.edu.au/research/archives* for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

at the **archives**
Wayne Doubleday

Every year we remember those who left Australian shores to fight in wars overseas.

The stories of their courage, ingenuity, and fortitude are celebrated in the Anzac legend.

But there is a part of that story that has largely been forgotten – that of the soldier settlers.

During the Great War, the war of 1914-1918, the question arose of how to repatriate the returning soldiers.

A scheme was presented whereby soldiers could apply for agricultural land on which to build a new life for themselves and their families.

Agriculture had been experiencing a boom just before the war; prices were rising and new markets emerging and expanding, so land was seen as an opportunity for the returning soldiers.

In 1916, the new Returned Soldiers Settlement Act made provision for the settlement of returned soldiers on Crown Lands or lands acquired under the Closer Settlement Acts.

Of course, there were conditions to be met before the government could start to dole out the land blocks. To apply for land, you:

1) had to be member of one of the Australian or British naval or military forces raised "for service in the war in which His Majesty (King George) is at present engaged";

2) must have served outside the Commonwealth in connection with the war (later amendments to the act included those who had enlisted for service overseas but had been forced to serve within the Commonwealth);

3) must be discharged from service and not due to misconduct or incapacity through your own fault.

There were two types of land tenures that were available under the Returned Soldiers Settlement Act: special holding and group purchase.

The special holding was a perpetual lease where the settler was required to reside on the land for the first five years; the right to purchase the land through instalments was granted in 1917.

The soldiers' group purchase allowed groups of returned soldiers to apply for land together.

Residence on the land was also required for the first five years and boundary fences were to be erected within three years.

Payment was by annual instalment.

Soldier settlers work on "a land fit for heroes".

What went wrong

WITH hindsight, the 1916 scheme of repatriating returned soldiers onto the land was not seen as a complete success.

Among the many reasons for this was that the soldier settlement scheme had been predicated on the high prices of the pre-war market.

Everything was working well for a few years and more and more soldiers were applying for land.

But then market prices began to fall. Settlers began to find themselves in financial difficultly.

They couldn't make the payments on their leases or group purchases, let alone the interest.

Soon, it was discovered that there were also over-capitalisation issues, some land was unsuited to the selected farming practices, or was of inadequate size and many settlers had no or little experience and training in farming.

The records

AT THE CSU Regional Archives, we have records relating to special holding tenures and soldiers' group purchase tenures from the Land Offices of Albury, Corowa, Gundagai, Narrandera, Temora, Tumbarumba, Tumut and Wagga.

These records can provide details on individual soldier settlement blocks, including the name and address of the applicant for the land, the date of application, the rent and interest paid, and a description of the land (such as parish, county, portion number, acreage, and capital value).

A land fit for heroes?

A NEW project called "A Land Fit for Heroes?" has been established by State Records NSW and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Also involved are Monash University, the Australian Research Council and the University of New England.

Its purpose is to examine the history of soldier settlement in NSW, a relatively unexplored area in our state's environmental, social, political and cultural history.

The project aims to record the forgotten stories of a generation of men and women who survived the Great War, then continued to battle for survival on the land intended to be their reward for service to their country.

Like many people before them, they struggled against isolation, financial hardship, drought and environmental degradation, some with the added burden of physical or psychological disabilities from the war.

A website has been created to help document this project. It contains a sample of soldier settler stories in the form of case studies, as well as indexes and links to other resources for research.

The "a land fit for heroes?" website can be found at *http://soldiersettlement.records.nsw.gov.au/*