

# **The Long Road Home: Repatriation in Tasmania, 1916-1929.**

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19 August 2005

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Andrew Richardson

19 August 2005

## Abstract

This thesis examines the work of repatriation authorities in Tasmania after WWI, the returned soldiers' responses to the system, and the experiences of both the soldiers and the authorities in re-establishing returned men into society.

Repatriation was one of the great problems facing Australian administrators after the Great War. The need to provide for the large numbers of returning soldiers and cater for their re-establishment into society was one of the most costly programs undertaken by the Commonwealth. Pryor, Lloyd, Rees, and Garton have all examined repatriation in Australia in a national context, while other authors have considered select repatriation policies on a regional basis. However, previous historians have failed to investigate the specific Tasmanian context of major Commonwealth repatriation policies such as the soldier land settlement scheme, employment, health services, and the political dimension of repatriation. This thesis focuses on the Tasmanian context to enable some comparison where applicable with Commonwealth outcomes of repatriation.

To provide comparison and to examine repatriation policy and its implementation in Tasmania, this thesis focuses on the design and implementation of Commonwealth Repatriation policy during the latter half of the war, and assesses a decade of its post war performance of, in particular, policies such as health and employment.

Returned soldiers' abilities to re-assimilate successfully into the community were determined by two main factors. Firstly, Commonwealth health policy, treatment, and subsequent pensions were crucial to Tasmanian returned soldiers who suffered injuries caused or aggravated by their war service. Secondly and even more important was the need for meaningful employment and vocational opportunities and training. Employment and vocational training for returned men had the most immediate impact on their abilities to re-engage with society and support families; hence it was crucial to the success in their efforts to repatriate.

One form of employment involved the Returned Soldier Land Settlement Scheme. It illustrated the provision of employment and vocational opportunities in Tasmania, and it suffered the highest failure rates in the Commonwealth in terms of soldiers vacated and of losses per head. Through the examination of legislation, departmental correspondence,

individual cases, media reports and a State Royal Commission, the path of the scheme in Tasmania is explored.

In understanding the design and implementation of Commonwealth repatriation policies and local responses to it, Tasmania's unique social and regional needs are highlighted. Repatriation in Tasmania largely confirms the broader national experience with some exceptions based on the State's comparatively isolated location, with the conclusion that Commonwealth policies, while at times adequate, could not hope to satisfy all the needs of the Tasmanian returned soldier.

## Acknowledgements

Even after spending so much time reading and thinking about this topic, I feel as if I have barely scratched the surface of what it offers. There is so much to tell, and so many stories, that it would take a lifetime to fully appreciate the experiences the men of the First AIF went through in returning 'home.' I hope I have done justice to them.

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