

knowledge of members, is obtainable. The ready co-operation of the various patriotic societies in this respect has been very fully appreciated both by the Department and the discharged soldiers in whose interests they have acted. On account of the present abnormal condition of the markets, settlers are encouraged to deal cautiously in the matter of stock, and to restrict their purchases as far as possible. The purchase of expensive implements for individual use has been discouraged, and settlers have been advised to combine and obtain implements for their common use. This arrangement has so far been found to give satisfaction.

LAND FOR MAORI SOLDIERS.

31. It may not be generally known that Maori members of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force have the same privileges in selecting land under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act as European members, and in one or two instances have taken advantage thereof. Moreover, the Native owners of 40,000 acres of land in the Owhaoko Block, south of Taupo, have signified their desire to set it apart for settlement by Maori soldiers, and their wishes are now under consideration by the Aotea Maori Land Board and the Government with a view to giving effect thereto. Special legislation may, however, be necessary to accomplish this.

PART II.—FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

ADVANCES.

32. During the year the sum of £36,000 was raised under the provisions of section 8 of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act, 1915, for the purpose of making advances, &c., to discharged soldiers. Out of this sum £2,155 4s. 1d. was spent in the purchase of fencing-wire, staples, &c., of which £465 10s. represents direct sales; £1,438 16s. 2d. has been debited to the settlers at cost against advances authorized, leaving £250 17s. 11d. worth of wire, &c., on hand in the Wellington District as at the 31st March last. The statement of accounts appended to the report shows that out of £30,956 4s. 1d. advanced on mortgage (including £640 10s. 1d. not charged up in Treasury at the 31st March), £1,199 4s. 9d. has been repaid, of which a considerable portion has been received through the dairy factories, the discharged-soldier settlers having given orders on the factories to pay the Department 12½ per cent. of their milk proceeds.

33. Advances amounting to £62,420 13s. 2d. were authorized to 199 soldiers, against which advances amounting to £30,956 4s. 1d., as stated above, have been made to 143 soldiers. Advances are made when actually earned, either in the purchase of stock, the erection of dwellinghouses, or general improvements to the land. As soon as a request for payment of an advance comes to hand the Commissioner of Crown Lands instructs the Ranger to inspect the stock purchased, or proposed to be purchased, and the improvements effected, and should the report of this officer be satisfactory steps are then taken to settle accounts direct with the vendors or contractors where necessary, or to the soldiers where the improvements have been effected by them. The balance of the authorities not earned at the 31st March is held available, and the advances authorized will be paid upon the conditions relating to payment of advances being complied with.

34. When the first advance is made a mortgage is given which covers all subsequent advances, and bills of sale as collateral security are executed in the case of advances for stock, chattels, &c. Advances in respect of these transactions are very varied, and cover almost all articles required in connection with farming operations, ranging from tools, milk-cans, &c., to horses, cattle, and sheep, seed-oats, potatoes, &c. Some delay has been experienced in settling accounts through the Treasury, but this has now been remedied by arrangements made with the Treasury to have accounts paid by the Commissioner of Crown Lands immediately upon receipt of invoices, &c.

35. The restrictions placed upon lands for disposal to the general public enabled the staff of the District Offices to devote attention to the settlement of lands by discharged soldiers, and to make arrangements for financial assistance without extra staff being required. As the Department did not incur any additional expense by way of administration, it was considered inadvisable to debit the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Account with the value of the time of those officers who were employed in giving effect to applications for financial assistance.

36. The Revenue Account shows a book loss of £135 7s. 5d., which has arisen through moneys being raised in anticipation of calls earlier than actually required, the result being that more interest is payable than would otherwise have been the case. In the meantime this small loss has been transferred to Suspense Account in anticipation of its being cleared off next year.

EXPERIENCE IN IMPROVED-FARM SETTLEMENTS.

37. In view of the financial assistance now rendered to discharged soldiers for the purpose of stocking and improving their lands, it is interesting to note that in 1912 the Government authorized the Department to arrange for the purchase of cattle for those improved-farm settlers in the Auckland, Taranaki, and Wellington Districts who were not in a position to stock their lands, and from then until the 31st March last the sum of £10,082 6s. was advanced for this purpose, the only security being bills of sale over the stock. Of this sum £8,384 1s. 9d. has been repaid, leaving a balance of £1,698 4s. 3d. outstanding at the end of last financial year. The settlers have considerably benefited by the assistance, and have generally fulfilled their obligations, and it is anticipated that the whole of the amount now outstanding will be repaid by the 31st March next.