

The small amount of commission earned by the Office on soldiers' estates, compared with the wholly disproportionate cost of administration, renders it desirable that the administration of all soldiers' estates shall be terminated at the earliest possible moment. Figures which have been prepared indicate that the deficiency resulting from the administration of soldiers' estates amounts to approximately £40,000, and this heavy charge has been borne by the Office.

The Public Trust Office Board has extended the concessions granted to soldiers' estates to all cases where death has occurred within three months of the soldier's return to the Dominion and his discharge from the Military Forces.

Under the system adopted, by which every soldier had a will form in his pay-book, troublesome delays occurred, owing to the length of time—usually in excess of twelve months—which elapsed between the soldier's death and the receipt of his pay-book in the Dominion. Until the receipt of the pay-book the Office was unable to determine with certainty whether the soldier had used the form in the pay-book or had died intestate. On the 28th February, 1918, however, a New Zealand Expeditionary Forces Army Order was issued directing that all pay-book wills of soldiers then on active service should be cancelled, and that each soldier should execute a will in legal form, or, in the alternative, sign a statement to the effect that he had already executed a will, or that he did not desire to execute a will. All new wills and certificates executed under this order were sent to London for safe custody.

Had this system been introduced at an earlier date, or if the war had continued, it would probably have resulted in expediting the administration of soldiers' estates, but, owing to the heavy casualties suffered during the seven months immediately following the issue of the Army order, the wills and certificates could not be forwarded immediately to New Zealand, and many are yet outstanding.

It is intended that as soon as the bulk of the soldiers' estates have been disposed of the Soldiers Division shall be dissolved, and the remaining estates be transferred to the Wills or Intestacies Divisions of the Office, according to the nature of the estate being administered.

The Public Trustee is still acting as Attorney for 579 soldiers, and holds on their account the sum of £39,042. Interest at the special rate of 4 per cent. is added to these funds. It is anticipated that most of this money will be paid out to the soldiers on their return to New Zealand within the next four or five months.

RECORDS DIVISION.

The work of centralizing the records in the Head Office has proceeded steadily throughout the year.

The record staff which was formerly dispersed throughout the various Divisions has been segregated under the control of the Supervisor of Records.

The consolidation has resulted in a reduction of five in the number of staff employed, although the number of files to be dealt with has increased during the year.

The estate files which were formerly located in nine separate positions throughout the Office have been assembled on the second floor of the new premises acquired by the Department.

The reorganization has resulted in improved supervision and control of the staff, increased convenience in handling files, and the reduction of traffic between rooms.

A "visible-slip" system has been adopted for recording particulars of—

- (a.) All estates under administration.
- (b.) Beneficiaries in estates.
- (c.) Lessees and tenants in estates.
- (d.) Mortgagors in estates.
- (e.) Persons in receipt of recurring payments from estates.
- (f.) Sinking funds for which the Public Trustee acts as Commissioner.
- (g.) Mortgagors under loans made from the Common Fund.