

Dear Arn,

8/1/88

There is a book in the mail for you. It has nothing to do with Xmas or the like. I found I had two copies and that was one more than I needed. Picked it up at a War Museum sale, forgetting that I had gotten a copy years ago. Reckoned it would give you something to browse into during the long hot summer afternoons.

It is Vol 6 of the Australian war history, WW1. Its interest is that it covers the last phase of the war, 1918. Despite the blood-letting of Gallipoli and two years in the trenches of the western front our mob emerged in 1918 as the most powerful, respected and feared army corps in Europe. The post-war records show that this was how we were seen by our allies and the Germans. Bean's history of 1918 shows just what we did to earn this reputation (Norm Wood's dad - "little Jimmy Woods"- gets a good mention for his VC).

Of course we always reckoned we were pretty bloody good and at the same time wondered how much of that was bullshit bragging. It was not bragging and the records show that Mon*ash could well have become Supreme Commander, Western Front if the war had gone on to summer 1919. Amongst the British forces the Guards and the Scottish divisions had been the shock troops. By 1918 they had shot their bolt. The Canadians had been used in this role from Vimy Ridge onwards but although they were, like us, volunteers they seemed not to adapt like us and they did not have the organization, leadership and tactics to handle the open warfare of 1918.

We did the same thing in New Guinea. By the time we went into the Ramu valley we had evolved the light battalion, devolved control down to brigade level (most of the time) and had a new body of tactics. It was really a pretty good effort if you compare it with the British Fourteenth Army in Burma- even though they had Slim.

We will be having a national scrabble game this year; trying to find the right words to describe ourselves (for our greater glorification?). I fear that the landing at Gallipoli will still be taken as the symbol of our warring ability_ gallant, dashing young heroes. If they try that I think I will have a go at them. It is a put- down.

For the rest of the year's shenanigans I think I will opt to sleep. Richard Hughes' "Fatal Shore" should do what I would like to see done to Manning Clark and his 'great' work on Australia's history. If Hughes has not done the trick there are five or six new history books that are due out, and they should do the trick.

Nearer to home I have been pining the demise of Laurie Connell and Parry. The bastards owe me \$7,500. That was for a creative piece of work I did for them on conferencing via satellite. Anything less than a debt in six to seven figures would not be noticed by them now. Tough!

We had a great old Xmas. All of our kids, their spouses and the grand-children turned up. But Jesus the celebrations dragged on. Celebrations started for us on the 19th Dec down at Bacchus Marsh - Merrelyn's parents golden anniversary at her sister's place. We got back in time to welcome my mob, who slept over for a few days. The last of the visitors and celebrations was yesterday, 5th January. Merrelyn wondered why last night she had the worst headache she had ever had (she does not normally get them)!

Having Steve here for a few days was great as he is a full-bottler on the personal computers. He taught me more in two days than I had learnt in five months. I had learnt to do what I wanted but took hours. Steve showed me how the systems worked and cut the time down to minutes. His new wife, Edda, was with him. She is a beaut person and real good looking. We had not met her before.

Your spell of hot weather has just arrived here. Very nice too. We are not planning to go down the coast for a week or so no matter how hot it gets. There is simply no un-booked camping space down there until the Xmas holiday mob start drifting back to work. Anyway, Jo and her mates have a really good pool, with water slides and the works, just a mile down the hill. I will probably go down for a swim later this afternoon.

Our gardening efforts, and plans, are much more modest than yours. Apart from bulbs and flowering winter shrubs our growing season (without frosts) is roughly October to March. Sweet corn, melons and late tomatoes usually do not ripen before the season is over. We do well with beans, beets, rhubarb, cabbages, strawberries, blackberries and that sort of European stuff. This year I put a special effort into cut flowers for the house, with reasonable success, whilst I try to open up more beds for vegies. That is darned near the same as quarrying. There are scattered pockets of soil but for the most part we have boulders of all sizes embedded in a matrix of clay. So we have to build our own soil or import it. It takes time and in the past we did not have much of that.

I do not know which is going to be the great spectator sport for this year -

watching the tide flow over the Parry's and Connell's of the business world ?

the antics of the BiCentennial Authority as they get drawn into things they did not plan ? or

the agonies of the universities as they endure Dawkins' re-education process ?

We have a special interest in the last one.

Well, good viewing mate,
all the best to Bett and you for '88,