

Decisive leader who 'ate Arnott's'

One reporter called him "The Man Who Ate Arnott's". David Johnson's career took him to the United States from where he swooped on the famous biscuit company of his native Australia.

He would receive a long list of academic honours along the way but it was in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains where he was born that Johnson said he learned his formative lessons.

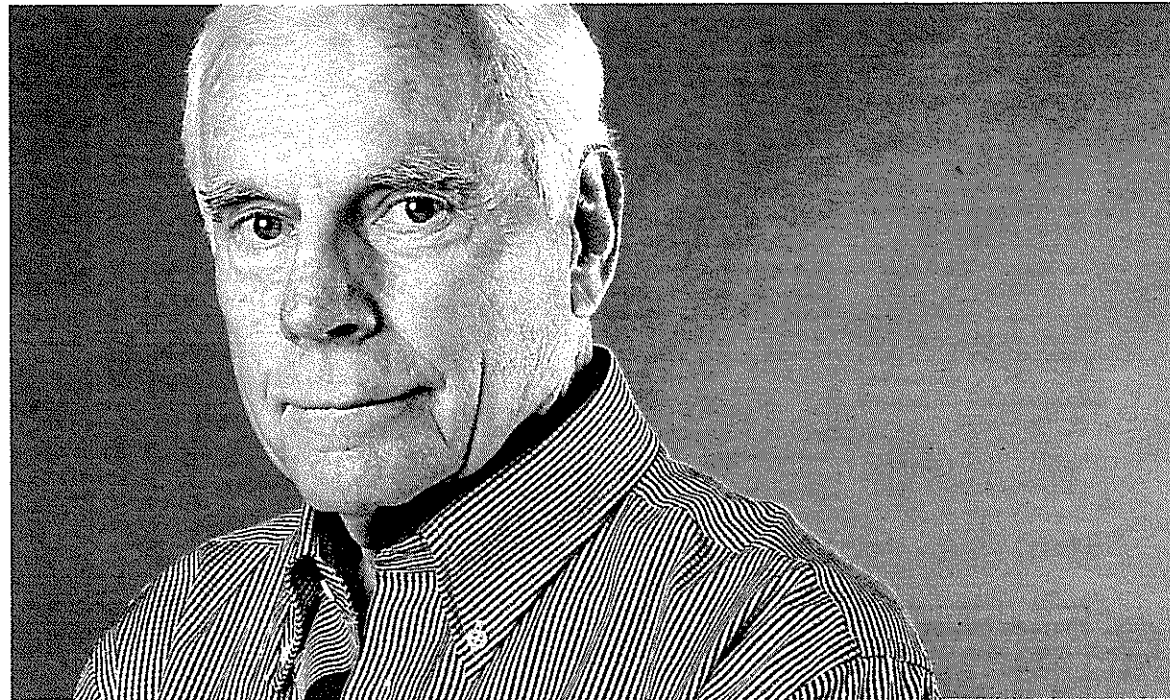
"The country taught you self-reliance," he told the *Herald* in 1997. "If the tractor broke down, and you couldn't grind a valve, where were you? You did what had to be done. Work had nothing to do with days of the week or hours of the day.

"If you saw it was going to rain, you'd keep working by lantern light. During lambing season, if you weren't up before dawn, the crows would pick the lambs' eyes out."

David Willis Johnson was born in Tumut in 1932 and grew up on a sheep and cattle station nearby and died in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, on June 19. His most cherished prize was to be voted by his peers as director of the year during his time at Campbell's Soup where he became chairman and chief executive in 1990.

He led radical changes. Directors were paid only in Campbell's shares and were stripped of all other benefits such as retirement plans and medical benefits. Executives were also required to buy and hold up to 300 per cent of their base salary in shares. Johnson believed it sharpened the focus.

"When you hold stock in the company, you have the added in-



David Johnson the former chief executive of Campbell's Soup whose lessons for work came from the sheep station where he grew up. Photo: Ben Rushton

centive to take your duties seriously," Johnson told *Business Review Weekly* in 1996.

His widow Sylvia said: "His mandate for professional accountability earned him the nickname Quantification Johnson."

Five years from when he started at Campbell's, he more than doubled its market value to \$20 billion. He led an aggressive corporate takeover to Australia to buy out another household name, the then family-owned Arnott's, whose fortunes were headed in the opposite direction to that of Campbell's.

The battle took him head to head

with several Arnott family members including Sandy Dawson, the great-great grandson of the company's founder.

'The country taught you self-reliance ... you did what you had to do.'

David Johnson

Johnson's widow, Sylvia said he did not look back. "He had no final views of the Arnott's takeover. He was a decisive man. He made his decision and moved on."

and Newington College where he captained the first XV rugby team and the rifle team. At the University of Sydney he captained the rugby, athletics and cricket teams at Wesley College, was Senior Student and won a rowing Blue.

He and Sylvia, of Lincolnshire via Port Lincoln in South Australia, married in the Chapel of the University of Sydney.

Johnson's corporate career began at Colgate Palmolive Company in Sydney as a management trainee and took him to South Africa. He joined Warner Lambert Company in Hong Kong and moved to the United States when the company moved its international headquarters. As chief executive of Entenmann's Bakery, he expanded the firm nationally then became chief executive to baby food company Gerber Products Company.

Johnson retired from Campbell's in 1997, when he finally had a "real" holiday, travelling extensively and visiting both the North and South Poles. The Johnsons fulfilled a dream to travel in the footsteps of Burke and Wills, visiting their graves in Melbourne. "It was truly one of the greatest holidays we ever took," says Sylvia. When not travelling, they lived a "bucolic" retirement with their greyhounds in historic, semi-rural Pennsylvania.

Johnson's funeral will be held in Coffs Harbour on July 6.

He will be buried there, after deciding it was a good resting place. "Plenty of kookaburras," he said.

Johnson is survived by his three sons: David, Justin and Harley, and his grandchildren.

Catharine Munro