

= Les Holden =

Leslie Hubert ( Les ) Holden , MC , AFC ( 6 March 1895 ? 18 September 1932 ) was an Australian fighter ace of World War I and later a commercial aviator . A South Australian , he joined the Light Horse in May 1915 , serving in Egypt and France . In December 1916 , he volunteered for the Australian Flying Corps and qualified as a pilot . As a member of No. 2 Squadron on the Western Front , he gained the sobriquets " Lucky Les " and " the homing pigeon " after a series of incidents that saw him limping back to base in bullet @-@ riddled aircraft . He was awarded the Military Cross , and went on to achieve five aerial victories flying Airco DH.5s and Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5s .

Promoted to captain , Holden finished the war as an instructor with No. 6 ( Training ) Squadron in England , where his work earned him the Air Force Cross . After leaving the Australian Flying Corps in 1919 , he became a manager at the family firm of Holden 's Motor Body Builders and joined the part @-@ time Citizen Air Force , before setting up as a commercial pilot and establishing his own air service . In 1929 , he located Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm in the north @-@ west Australian desert after the pair was reported missing on a flight to England in the Southern Cross . Holden began transport operations in New Guinea in 1931 . He was killed the following year in a passenger plane crash in Australia .

= = Family and early life = =

Leslie Hubert Holden was born on 6 March 1895 in East Adelaide , South Australia , to travelling businessman Hubert William Holden and his wife Annie Maria . Les was the nephew of Henry Holden , who later founded the Adelaide @-@ based firm Holden 's Motor Body Builders with his son Edward . Hubert Holden landed a partnership with Nestlé in 1905 , and the family moved to Turramurra , New South Wales . Les completed his education at Sydney Church of England Grammar School , and joined Nestlé in 1911 as a salesman . By the time Australia entered World War I in August 1914 , he was an assistant manager .

= = World War I = =

Holden enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 26 May 1915 , and was posted to the 4th Light Horse Brigade as a private . He departed for Egypt aboard the transport A29 Suevic on 13 June . Serving as a driver first in the Middle East and then on the Western Front , his mechanical ability and sense of adventure led him to volunteer for the Australian Flying Corps ( AFC ) in December 1916 . After qualifying as a pilot in England , he was commissioned a lieutenant and posted to No. 2 Squadron . Commanded by Major Oswald Watt , No. 2 Squadron 's personnel included many former Lighthorsemen , as well as mechanics from the AFC 's first combat formation , the Mesopotamian Half Flight . The force trained extensively in England commencing in January 1917 , before deploying to the Western Front that September . Holden was involved in the AFC 's first day of combat in France ; just after noon on 2 October , in the vicinity of Saint @-@ Quentin , he and his wingman engaged a German two @-@ seater that managed to escape .

Because its Airco DH.5s were handicapped as fighters by engine problems and low speed , No. 2 Squadron was employed mainly in ground support duties . During the fog @-@ shrouded opening day of the Battle of Cambrai on 20 November , Holden bombed and machine @-@ gunned a German communications trench from altitudes as low as 20 or 30 feet ( 6 @-@ 1 or 9 @-@ 1 metres ) . He returned to a forward airfield near Havrincourt Wood with his plane " a flying wreck " , in the words of the official history of Australia in the war . " Every part of it was shot full of holes , including petrol @-@ tank , tail @-@ plane , both longerons , and part of the undercarriage , while the elevator control was shot clean away . " Two days later he repeated the exercise with similar consequences for his aircraft ? " clear evidence of the dangers of the work and of his own good luck " , as the official history put it . This brace of close calls gained him the nicknames " Lucky Les " and " the homing pigeon " . He was recommended for the Military Cross on 3 December for his actions of 20 November . The award was promulgated in the London Gazette on 4 February 1918 , and the

citation appeared on 5 July :

Lt. Leslie Hubert Holden , F.C.

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty . Whilst on a special mission he dropped a bomb direct on a support trench full of the enemy , causing them to scatter , and another bomb upon a strong point which was holding up our advance . He also bombed a large group of enemy infantry , and turned his machine gun on them from a height of 100 feet . He rendered very valuable service throughout the operations .

Holden claimed his first aerial victory while No. 2 Squadron was still flying DH.5s , before it began converting to Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5s in December 1917 . On 18 February 1918 , he shared in one of the unit 's first two victories in the S.E.5 , helping send an Albatros down in a spin . He claimed another three aircraft shot down over the following month , giving him a total of five victories . At least one of these took place during the Spring Offensive , on 22 March , when all available Allied aircraft were thrown into battle to stem the German advance .

Royal Air Force policy required pilots to be rotated to home establishment for rest and instructional duties after nine to twelve months in combat . Promoted to captain in March 1918 , Holden was posted to England in May as a flying instructor with No. 6 ( Training ) Squadron at Minchinhampton . His unit was part of the 1st Training Wing , led by Lieutenant Colonel Watt , the former commanding officer of No. 2 Squadron . Holden briefly took command of No. 6 Squadron from 25 July to 11 August . He was awarded the Air Force Cross , promulgated on 3 June 1919 , for his skill as an instructor .

= = Post @-@ war career and legacy = =

No. 6 Squadron was disbanded in March 1919 . Along with many other Australian Flying Corps personnel including Colonel Watt , Major Roy King , and Captain Garnet Malley , Holden departed for Australia on 6 May aboard the troopship Kaiser @-@ i @-@ Hind , disembarking in Sydney on 19 June . He was discharged from the AFC on 18 August 1919 . After taking part in the Commonwealth Government 's Peace Loan flights , he joined Holden 's Motor Body Builders as its Sydney manager . In May 1921 , he served with Malley and other veteran pilots as a pall @-@ bearer at Watt 's funeral in Randwick . Holden married Kathleen Packman at St Mark 's Anglican Church in Darling Point on 3 June 1924 ; the couple had three daughters . On 19 June 1925 , the Royal Australian Air Force ( RAAF ) established the Citizen Air Force as a part @-@ time active reserve , and Holden became one of its first recruits . Ranked flight lieutenant , he served as a pilot with No. 3 Squadron , which operated Airco DH.9s and S.E.5s. Formed at RAAF Point Cook , Victoria , it transferred to the newly opened RAAF Richmond , New South Wales , during 29 ? 30 June ; Holden and Malley touched down at Richmond with the first two S.E.5s on the 30th .

Still hankering after a full @-@ time career in flying , Holden enlisted the help of friends to purchase a de Havilland DH.61 Giant Moth in 1928 . He named it Canberra , and used it to start a charter operation out of Mascot Aerodrome in Sydney . Holden became a national celebrity in April 1929 when he successfully undertook an aerial search of the north @-@ western Australian wilderness to locate Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm , after the pair had gone missing on a flight from Sydney to England in the Southern Cross . Two other searchers , Keith Anderson and Bob Hitchcock , were lost in their aircraft , the Kookaburra . The media of the day turned on Smith and Ulm , accusing them of a publicity stunt , and the Sydney Citizens ' Relief Committee , which had commissioned Holden to undertake the rescue operation , withheld payment of his expenses . He nevertheless continued flying commercially , and is credited with making ? in September 1931 ? possibly the first flight from Sydney to New Guinea , where he started an air freight service . Returning to Sydney the following year , he established Holden 's Air Transport Services . He also acquired two more aircraft for his New Guinea operations , a Waco and a Moth , to supplement the Canberra .

On 18 September 1932 , Holden was travelling as a passenger aboard a New England Airways DH.80 Puss Moth from Sydney to Brisbane when it crashed at Byron Bay in northern New South Wales , killing him instantly . The other occupants , pilot Ralph Virtue and the joint owner of the

Canberra , Holden 's schoolfriend Dr George Hamilton , also perished . Investigations determined that the Puss Moth , VH @-@ UPM , had gone down as a result of wing failure caused by aileron flutter . A crowded memorial service for Holden and Hamilton took place at Sydney Church of England Grammar School on 20 September ; they were cremated that afternoon at Rookwood Cemetery , where eighteen aircraft piloted by friends and associates of the pair overflew the chapel . Holden was survived by his wife and children . His father Hubert carried on operating Holden 's Air Transport Services , floating it as a public corporation and serving as chairman . Les Holden , George Hamilton , and one of their schoolmates who had also recently died , Henry Braddon , were commemorated with a memorial stained @-@ glass window at the Sydney Church of England Grammar School chapel in 1934 . Holden was also honoured by Holden Street , built in the Sydney suburb of Maroubra in 1943 .