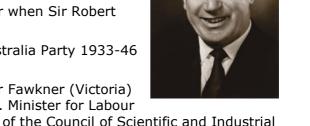## Harold Edward HOLT, PC, CH

Prime Minister 26 January 1966 to 19 December 1967

- Harold Holt became the 17th prime minister when Sir Robert Menzies retired in January 1966.

- Member of the Nationalist Party, United Australia Party 1933-46 and the Liberal Party of Australia 1944-67.

- Member of the House of Representatives for Fawkner (Victoria) 1935-49 and for Higgins (Victoria) 1949-67. Minister for Labour and National Service and Minister in charge of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research 1940-41; Immigration 1949-56; Labour and National Service 1949-58; Treasurer 1958-66.

- Holt drowned while swimming on 17 December 1967 and was replaced by Deputy Prime Minister John McEwen, Leader of the Country Party in the Liberal-Country Party Coalition.

### Main achievements (1940-1967)

- As Minister for Labour and National Service, 1940-41, Holt introduced a national child endowment scheme for second and subsequent children.

- He was a foundation member of the modern Liberal Party 1944.

- Delegate to Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Chair of its Council 1951.

- As Minister for Immigration, 1949-56, he oversaw the intake of 900,000 immigrants – a record unmatched by any minister to this day. He also introduced annual citizenship conventions and, as prime minister, announced a liberalisation of restrictions on admissions under the White Australia Policy in 1966. He is remembered as someone who did a lot to integrate Australia into Asia.

- As Minister for Labour and National Service in 1949-58 he introduced conscription for the Korean War.

- As Treasurer in 1959 he established the Reserve Bank.

- As Prime Minister, he supported the 1967 referendum which allowed the Commonwealth government to legislate on Aboriginal affairs. More controversial was his decision to increase Australia's troop commitment to the Vietnam War by 6 500 troops. Also during his term, decimal currency was introduced and Australia's first satellite launched.

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**Personal life**

- Born 5 August 1908 at Stanmore, Sydney. Died 17 December 1967, presumed drowned at Cheviot Beach, Victoria.

- Educated Randwick Public School, Abbotsholme, Wesley Preparatory School, Wesley College and University of Melbourne 1927-30. Excelled at sporting and theatrical activity. Admitted to the Bar in 1932 and started practice as a solicitor in 1933.

- Mother died in 1925. Father had highly successful career in the entertainment industry as a manager and entrepreneur.

- Around 1936, Harold established a legal firm in Collins Street, Melbourne, in partnership with Jack Graham. The partnership became Holt, Graham & Newman after the Second World War and lasted until 1963.

- Enlisted in Australian Imperial Force in 1940 but recalled three months later by Prime Minister Menzies when three cabinet ministers were killed in an air crash near Canberra.

- Married Zara Dickins at Toorak, Melbourne, on 8 October 1946.

**Life after politics**

- Holt was the third Prime Minister to die in office.

**Character**

- *A dashing figure: of middle height, fit and handsome, with thick black hair swept back, well-tailored clothes, a ready smile and a natural charm …. human touch and flexibility [an] "instinctive conciliator… In many ways he was an ordinary bloke who liked to be liked. Humble, sensitive to criticism, gregarious – without revealing too much of himself – he could mix with anyone. He thrived on people, and liked women. (*Source: *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* Volume 14, pp. 475, 479-80)

**Did you know?**

- In 1966, Holt promoted Dame Annabelle Rankin to the Federal ministry. As Minister for Housing, she was the first woman to hold a Federal portfolio.

- He was dubbed 'Young Harold' by his mentor, Robert Menzies. He is better remembered, though, for his 'All the way with LBJ' declaration in Washington in 1966.

- Holt was the first prime minister to employ a speech writer.

**Sources**

Hancock, Ian, 'Holt, Harold Edward (1908 - 1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 14, MUP, 1996, pp 474-480. Online: www.adb.online.anu.edu.au

National Archives of Australia: http://primeministers.naa.gov.au

**Further reading**

Frame, Tom, *Life and death of Harold Holt*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005

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