

# Introduction

## Sir Robert Menzies: Australia's Longest Serving Prime Minister

Educational resource presented by The  
Robert Menzies Institute for educators

# Menzies: A Summary

Sir Robert Menzies was Australia's longest serving prime minister and became Prime Minister twice in his political career. His first term as prime minister was from 1939 to 1941, then from 1949 to 1966.

Menzies should also be remembered for being the prime minister who informed the Australian people via radio that the nation was at war with Germany on 3 September 1939.



Source: Robert Menzies takes up residence at The Lodge in Canberra on 24 May 1939.

**“Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war on her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.”**

Source: Menzies announcing that war has been declared upon Germany, 3 September 1939. Australian Screen.  
<https://aso.gov.au/titles/radio/menzies-speech-declaration-war/clip/>

In August 1941, Menzies resigned as Prime Minister and as leader of the United Australia Party (UAP). Unusually, Menzies was replaced as prime minister by the leader of the UAP's junior coalition party, Country Party leader Arthur Fadden. However, Fadden was unable to maintain power and in October of that year John Curtin and his Labor Government were sworn in.



Source: Queen Elizabeth II arrives at Parliament House Canberra, escorted by PM Robert Menzies, February 15, 1954.



Source: Robert Menzies in 1916, age 23.



Source: Official portrait of PM Robert Menzies, 1955 by Sir Ivor Hele (1912 – 1993).

Menzies did not spend long in the political wilderness as two short years later he was back as leader of the UAP and leader of the Opposition. However, it was felt that the UAP had lost direction and that there was a need for a new party to be formed, one that could truly represent the liberal principles of freedom and opportunity that they believed in. Menzies was a key player in the development of this new political party and, in 1944, the Liberal Party was formed.

Both the new party and Menzies himself were vindicated in 1949 when the Liberal Party won the election and Menzies was sworn in as Prime Minister of Australia for the second time. His re-election was an incredible comeback and he proved to be an able leader for the next sixteen years. In all, Menzies served as Australian prime minister for eighteen years and one hundred and sixty-seven days.



Source: Prime Minister Robert Menzies in his office, April 1960. National Archives of Australia.